



US009204924B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Marczyk et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,204,924 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Dec. 8, 2015**

(54) **ENDOSCOPIC VESSEL SEALER AND
DIVIDER HAVING A FLEXIBLE
ARTICULATING SHAFT**

2017/00314; A61B 2017/00327; A61B
2017/2927; A61B 2017/2929; A61B
2018/00619; A61B 2018/1412; A61B
2018/1455

(71) Applicant: **Covidien LP**, Mansfield, MA (US)

See application file for complete search history.

(72) Inventors: **Stanislaw Marczyk**, Stratford, CT (US);
Russell Pribanic, Roxbury, CT (US);
David Farascioni, Bethel, CT (US);
Eric J. Taylor, East Hampton, CT (US);
Peter Hathaway, Lebanon, CT (US)

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U.S. Appl. No. 09/387,883, filed Sep. 1, 1999, Schmaltz et al.

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(73) Assignee: **Covidien LP**, Mansfield, MA (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this
patent is extended or adjusted under 35
U.S.C. 154(b) by 104 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **13/914,656**

(22) Filed: **Jun. 11, 2013**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2013/0274741 A1 Oct. 17, 2013

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 12/718,143, filed on
Mar. 5, 2010, now Pat. No. 8,475,453, which is a
continuation-in-part of application No. 12/443,087,
filed as application No. PCT/US2007/021440 on Oct.
5, 2007.

(Continued)

(51) **Int. Cl.**
A61B 18/12 (2006.01)
A61B 18/14 (2006.01)

(Continued)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **A61B 18/1445** (2013.01); **A61B 17/29**
(2013.01); **A61B 17/295** (2013.01);
(Continued)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC .. A61B 17/29; A61B 17/295; A61B 18/1445;
A61B 18/1492; A61B 2017/003; A61B

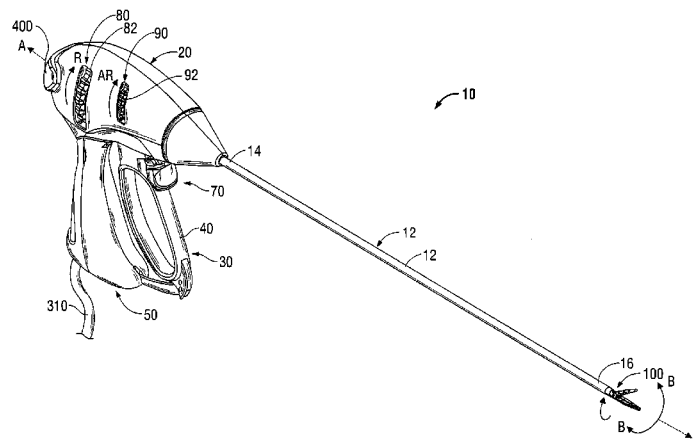
Primary Examiner — Michael Peffley

Assistant Examiner — Daniel Fowler

(57) **ABSTRACT**

An electrosurgical instrument for treating tissue includes a housing having a shaft extending therefrom having an axis A-A defined therethrough. The shaft is at least partially flexible and includes first and second jaw members attached at a distal end thereof. Each jaw member includes an electrically conductive tissue contacting surface adapted to connect to a source of electrosurgical energy such that the electrically conductive tissue contacting surfaces are capable of conducting electrosurgical energy through tissue held therebetween. A drive assembly is disposed in the housing and has a first actuator operably coupled to a drive rod for reciprocation thereof to move the jaw members from a first position in spaced relation to one another to a second position closer to one another for engaging tissue. A second actuator is disposed on the housing and is actuatable to articulate the shaft.

6 Claims, 67 Drawing Sheets



Related U.S. Application Data

- (60) Provisional application No. 61/249,054, filed on Oct. 6, 2009, provisional application No. 61/157,722, filed on Mar. 5, 2009, provisional application No. 60/850,214, filed on Oct. 6, 2006.

(51) **Int. Cl.**

A61B 17/29 (2006.01)

A61B 17/295 (2006.01)

A61B 17/00 (2006.01)

A61B 18/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC *A61B 18/1492* (2013.01); *A61B 2017/003* (2013.01); *A61B 2018/00619* (2013.01); *A61B 2018/00642* (2013.01); *A61B 2018/00922* (2013.01); *A61B 2018/1412* (2013.01); *A61B 2018/1455* (2013.01)

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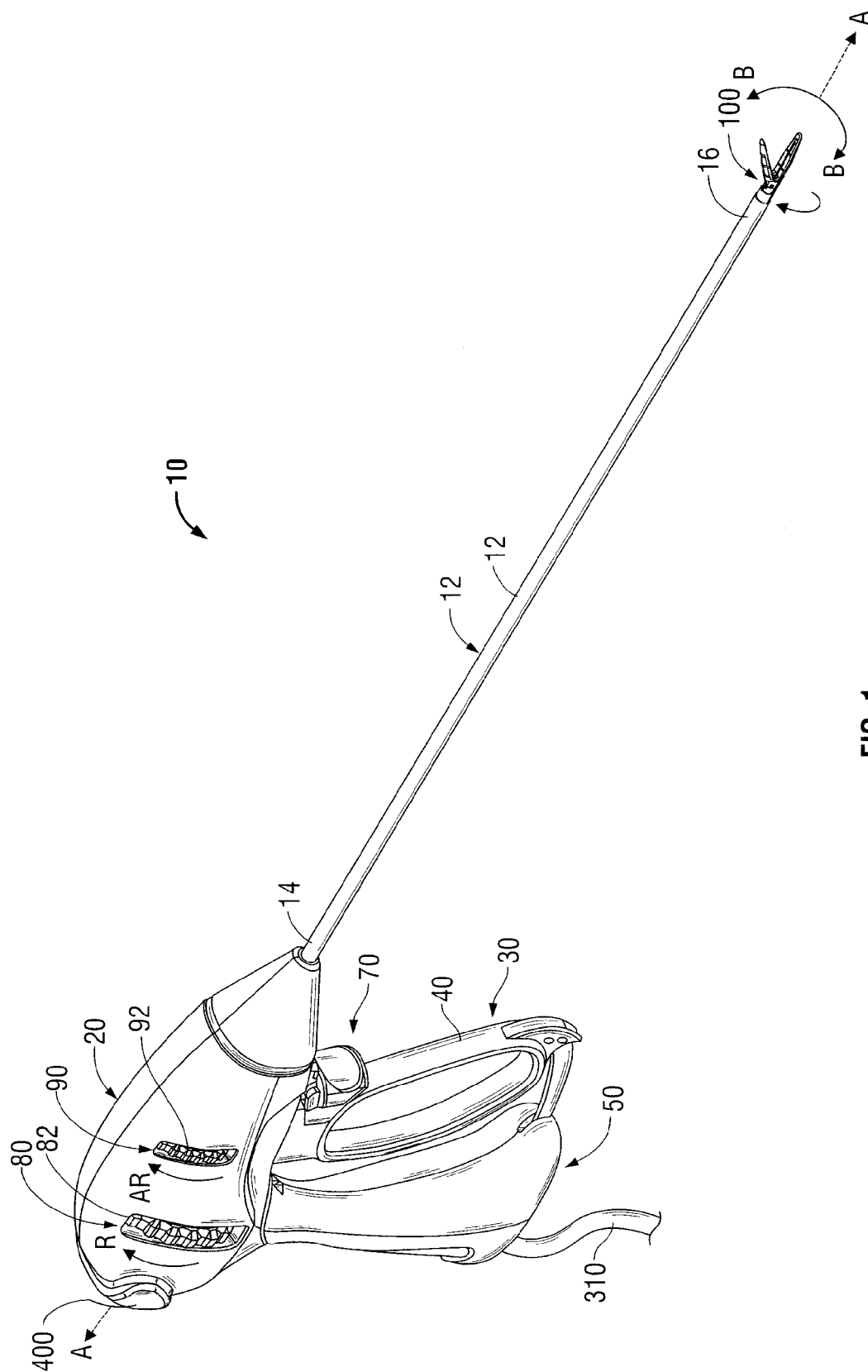
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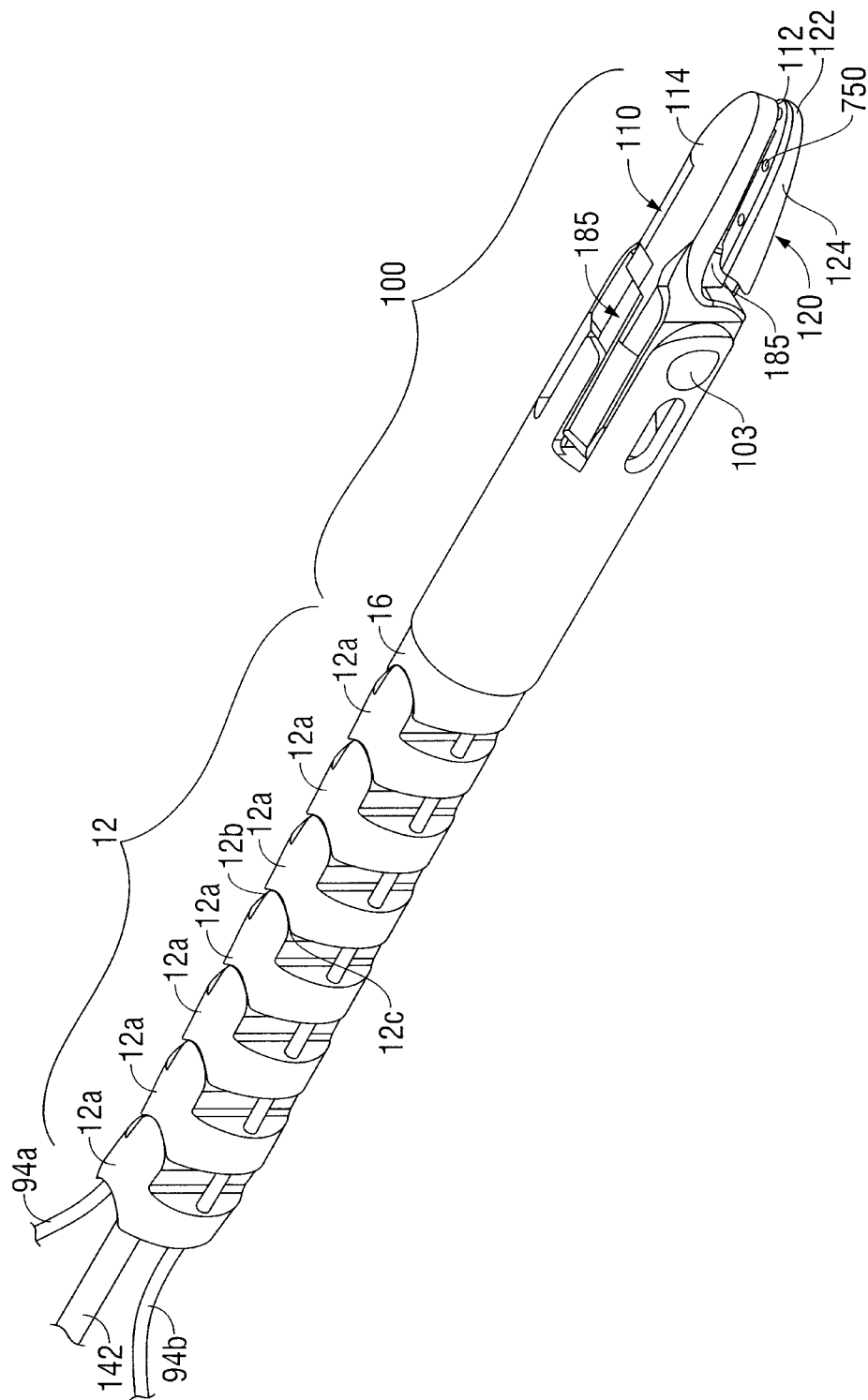


FIG. 2

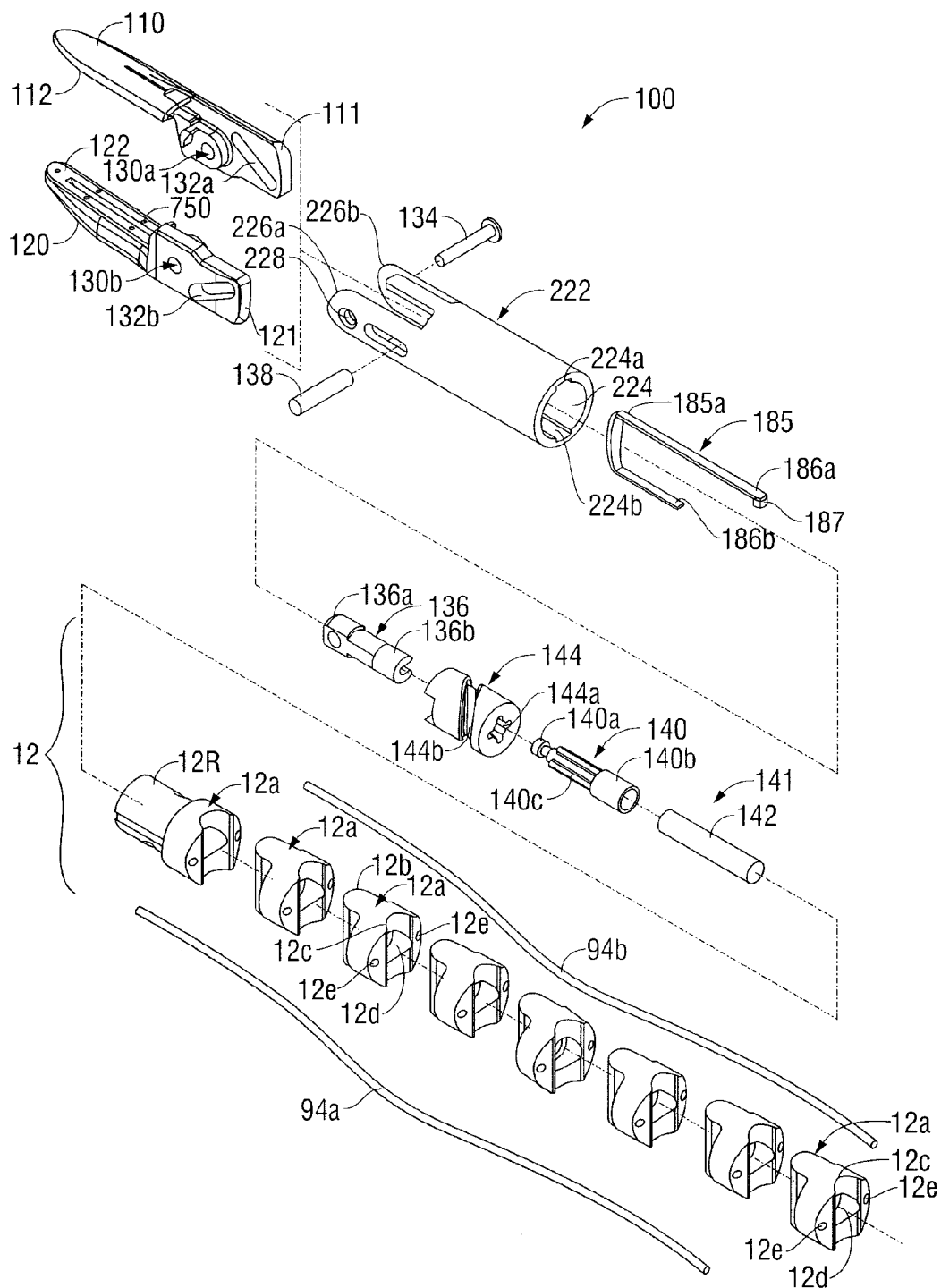


FIG. 3

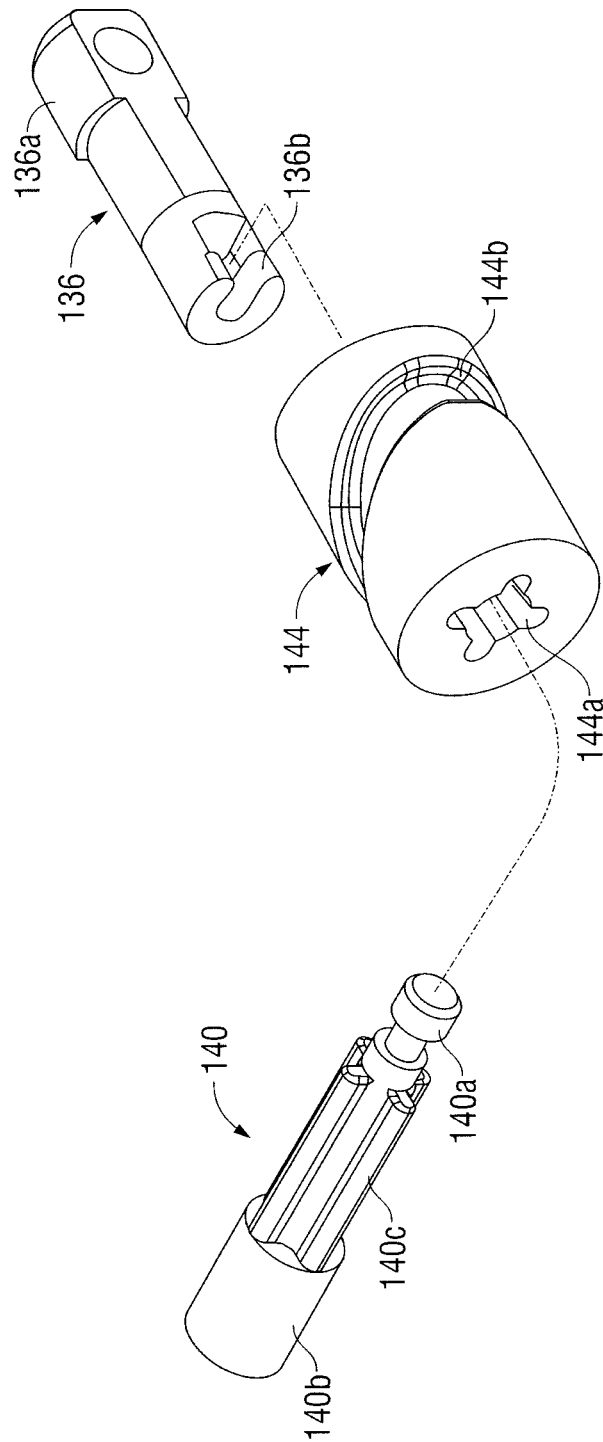


FIG. 4

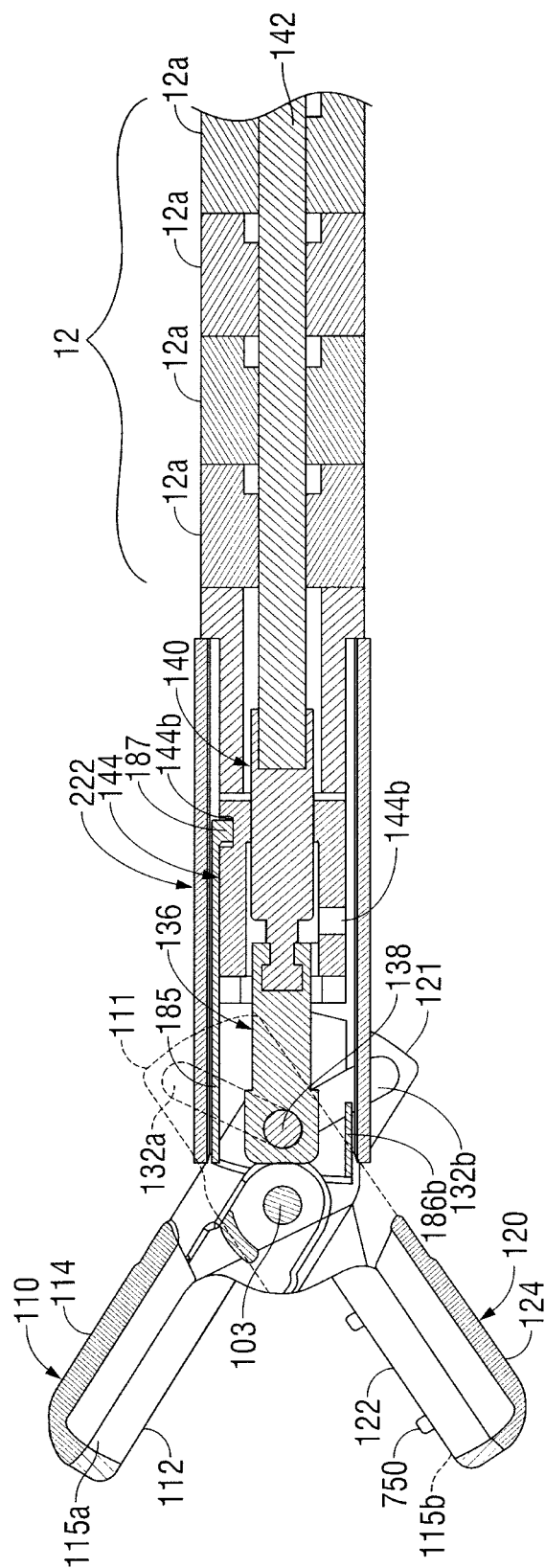


FIG. 5

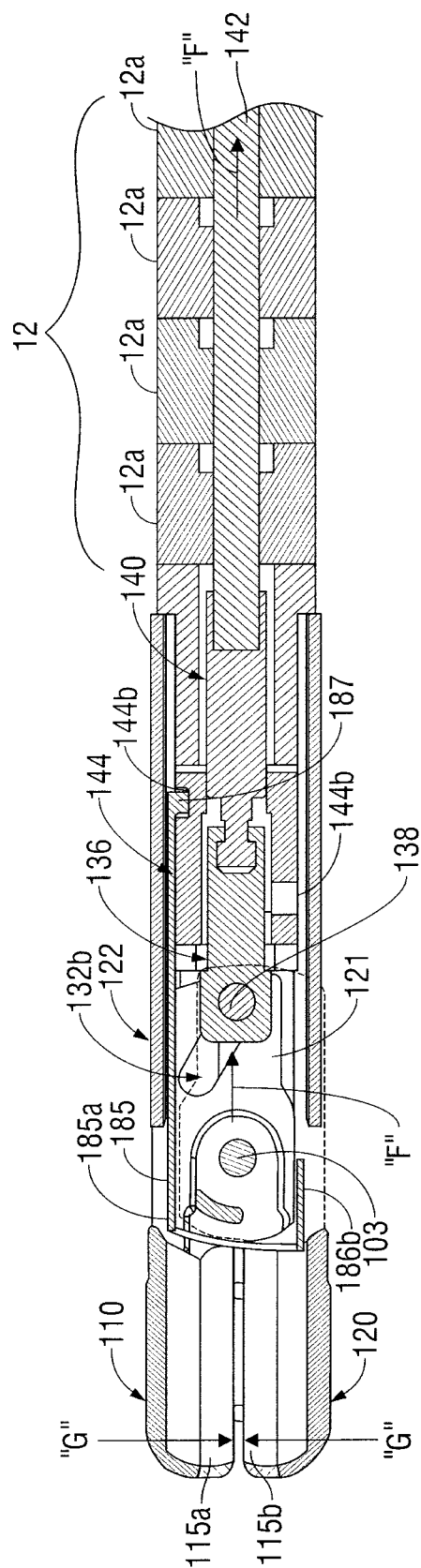


FIG. 6

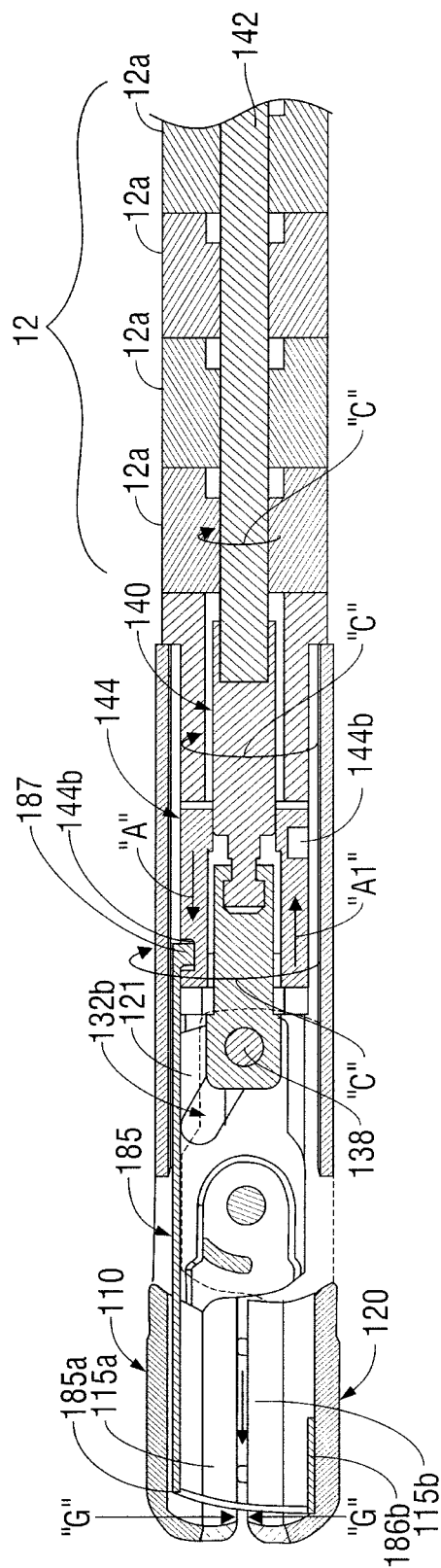


FIG. 7

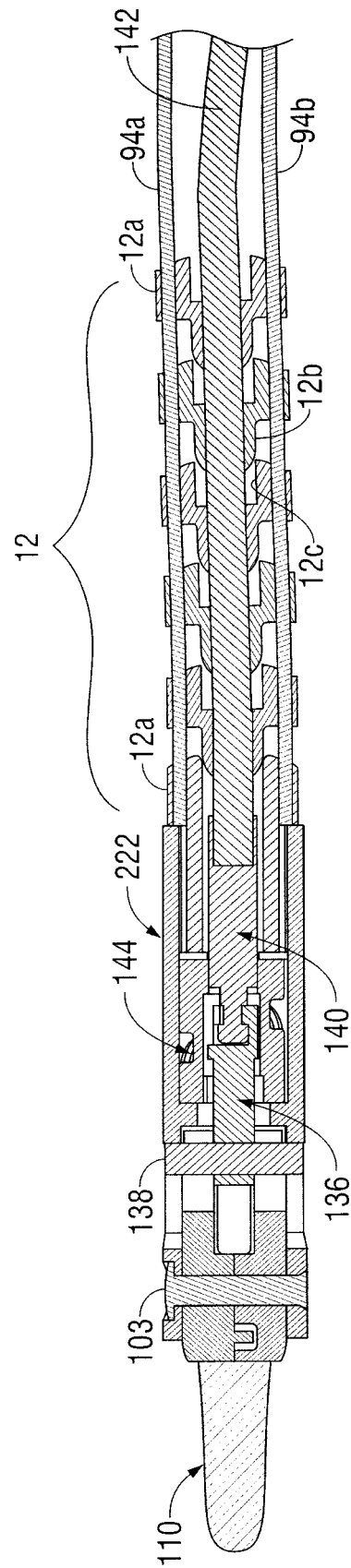


FIG. 8

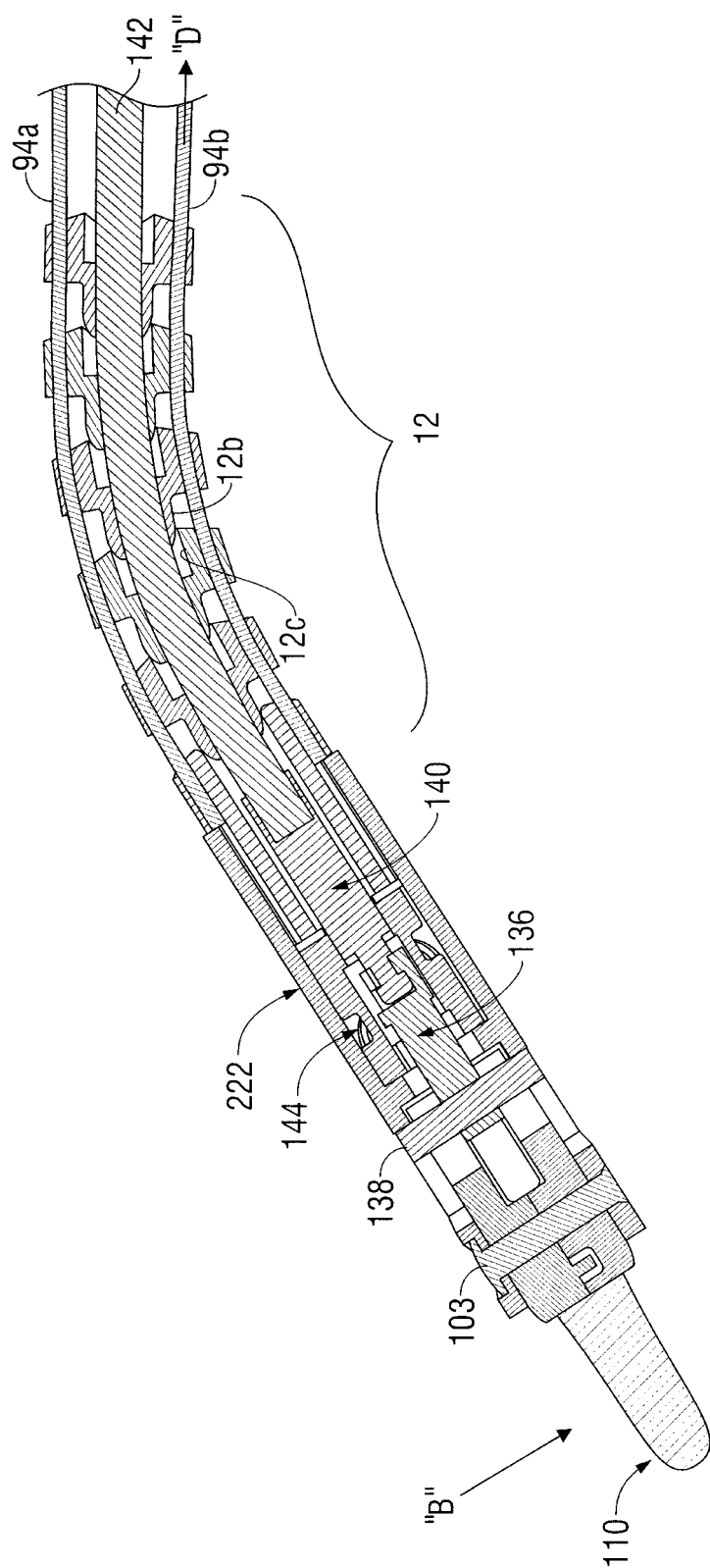


FIG. 9

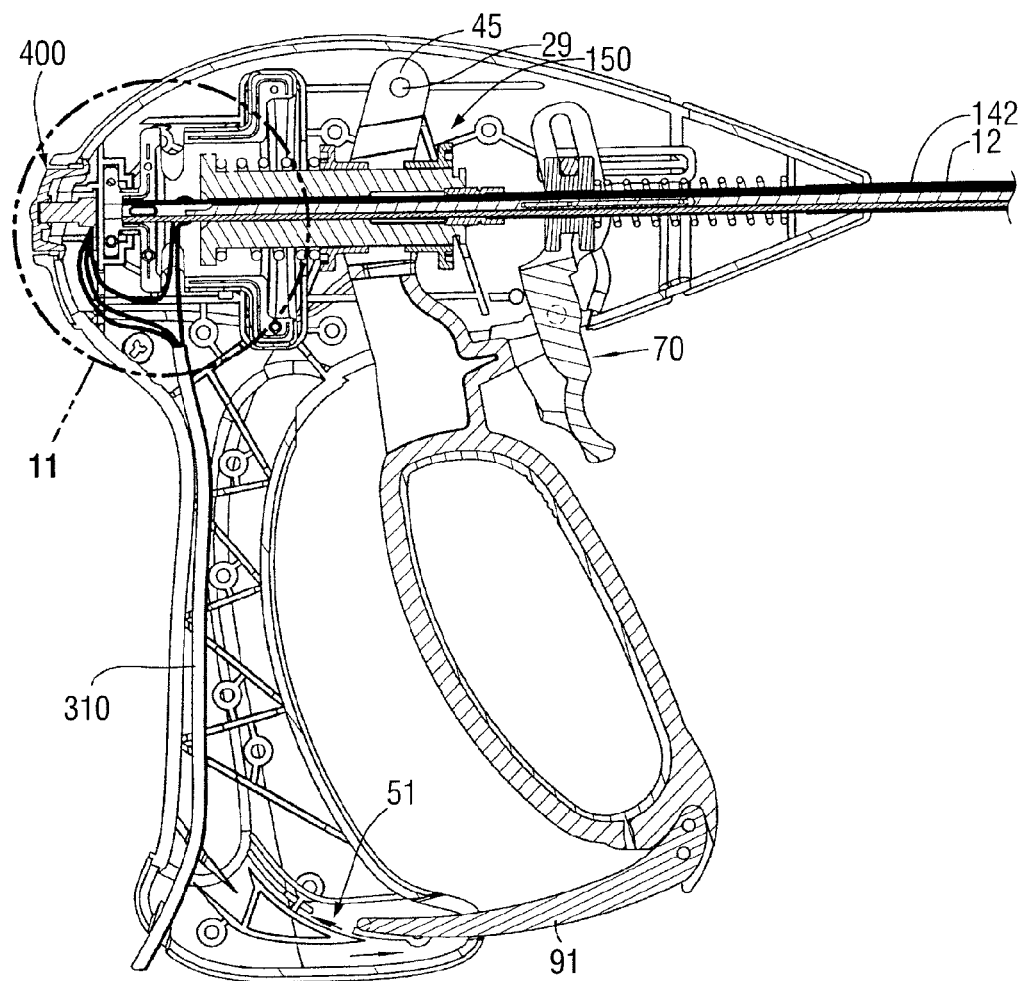


FIG. 10

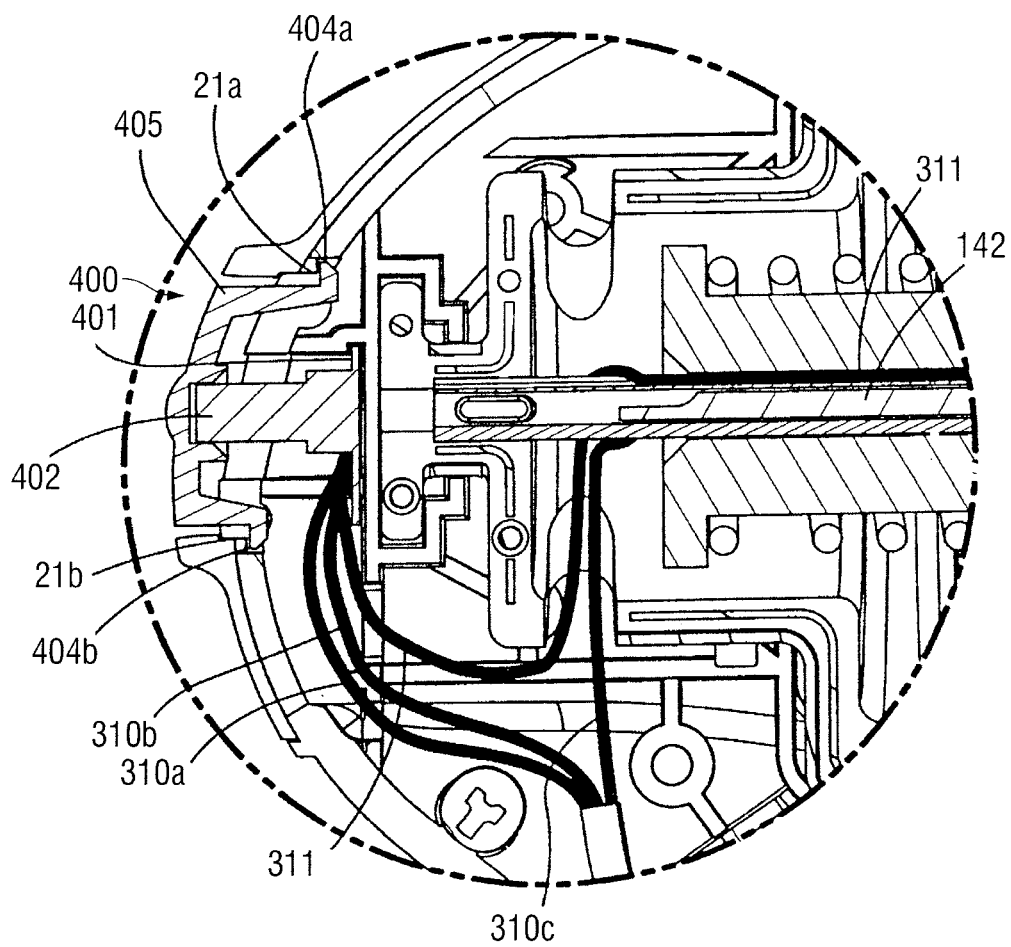


FIG. 11

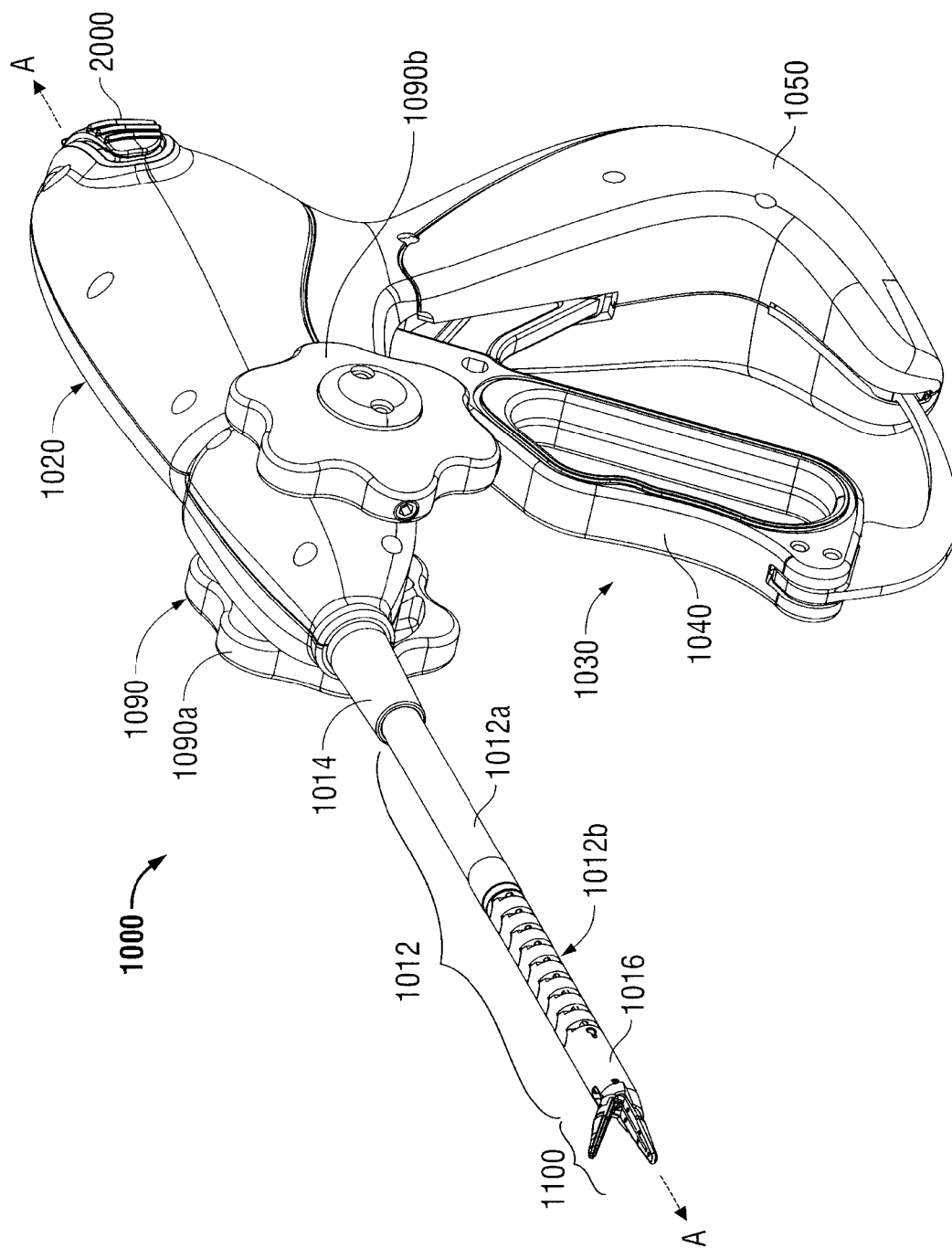


FIG. 12

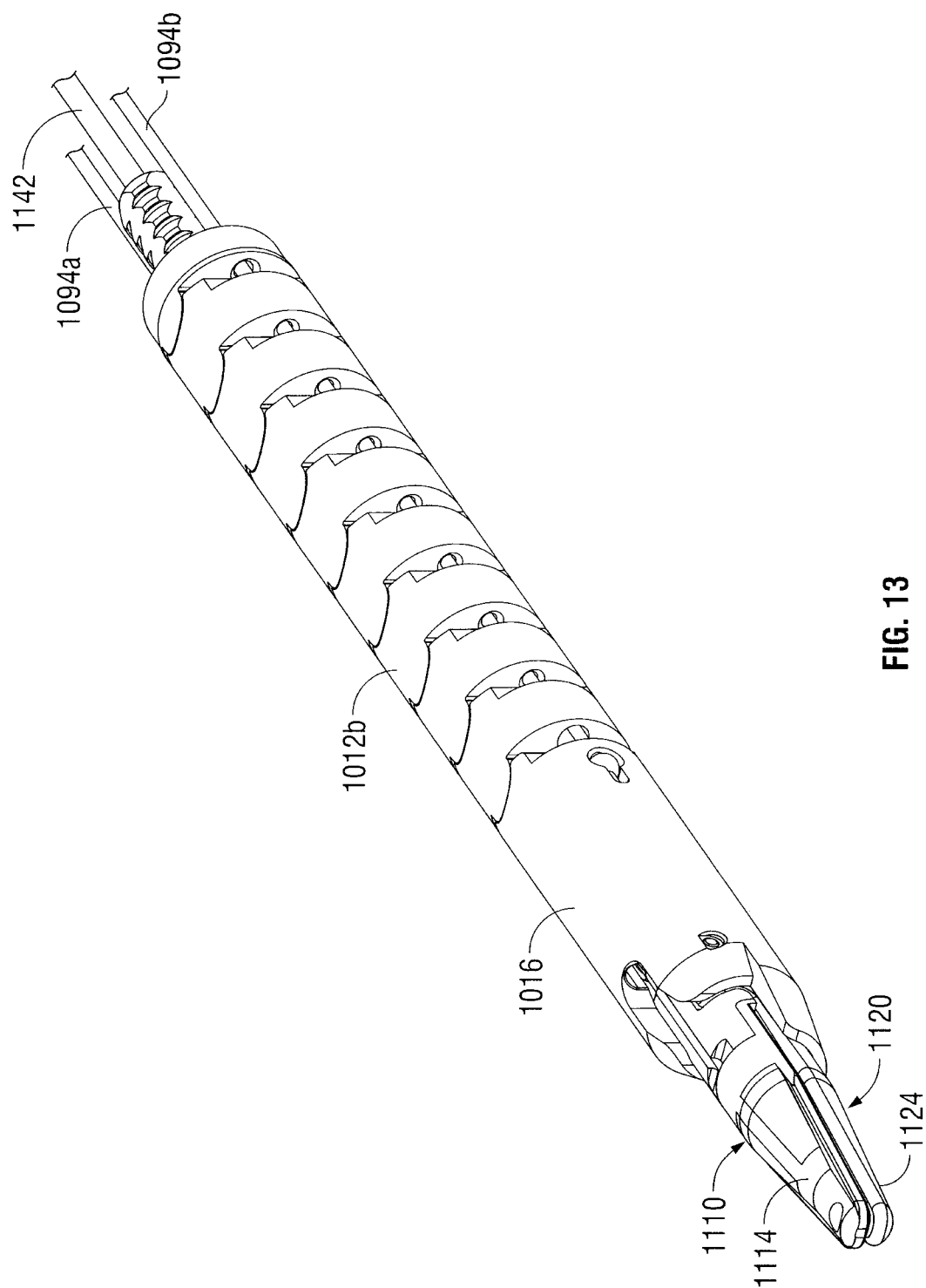


FIG. 13

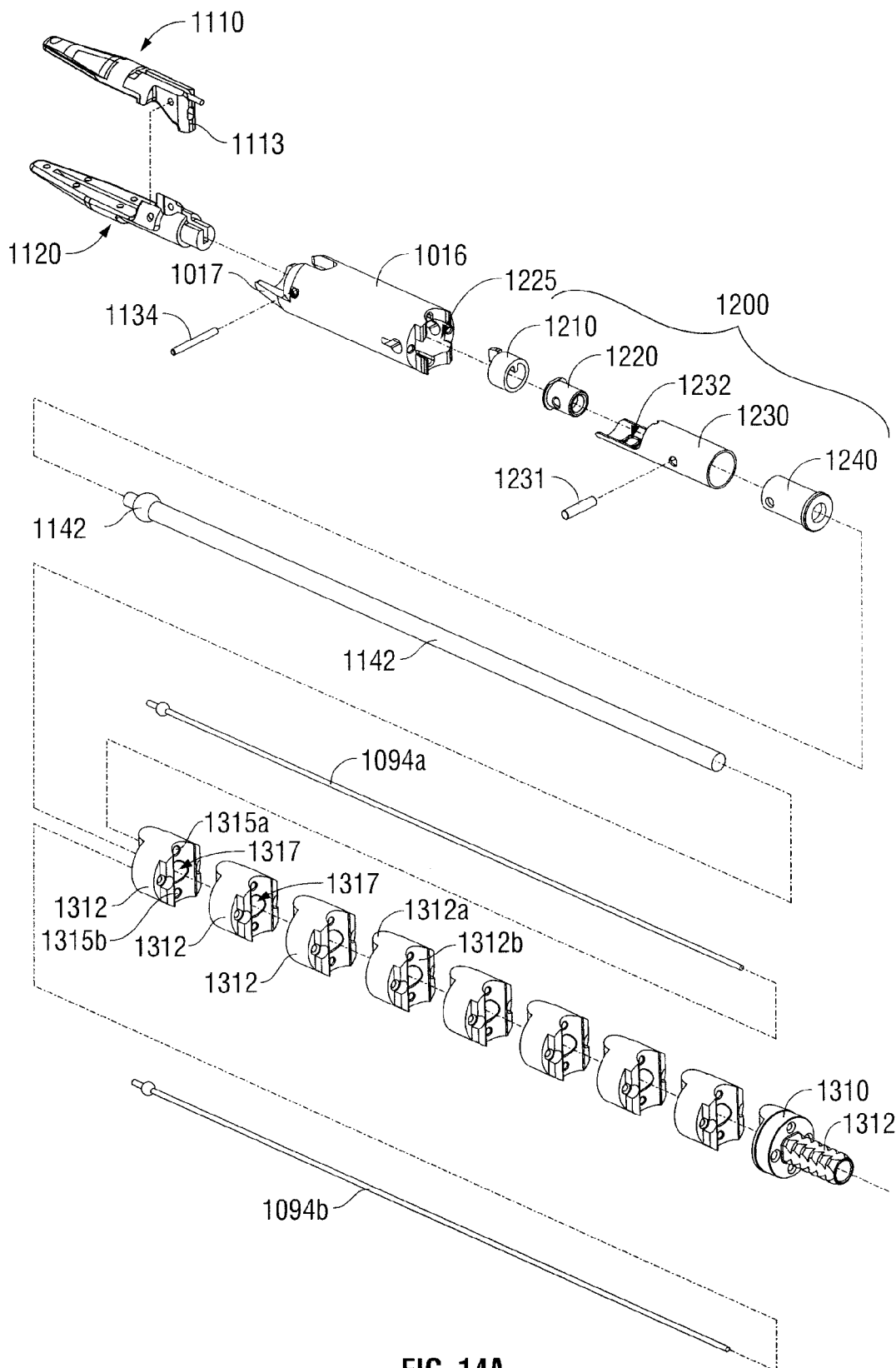


FIG. 14A

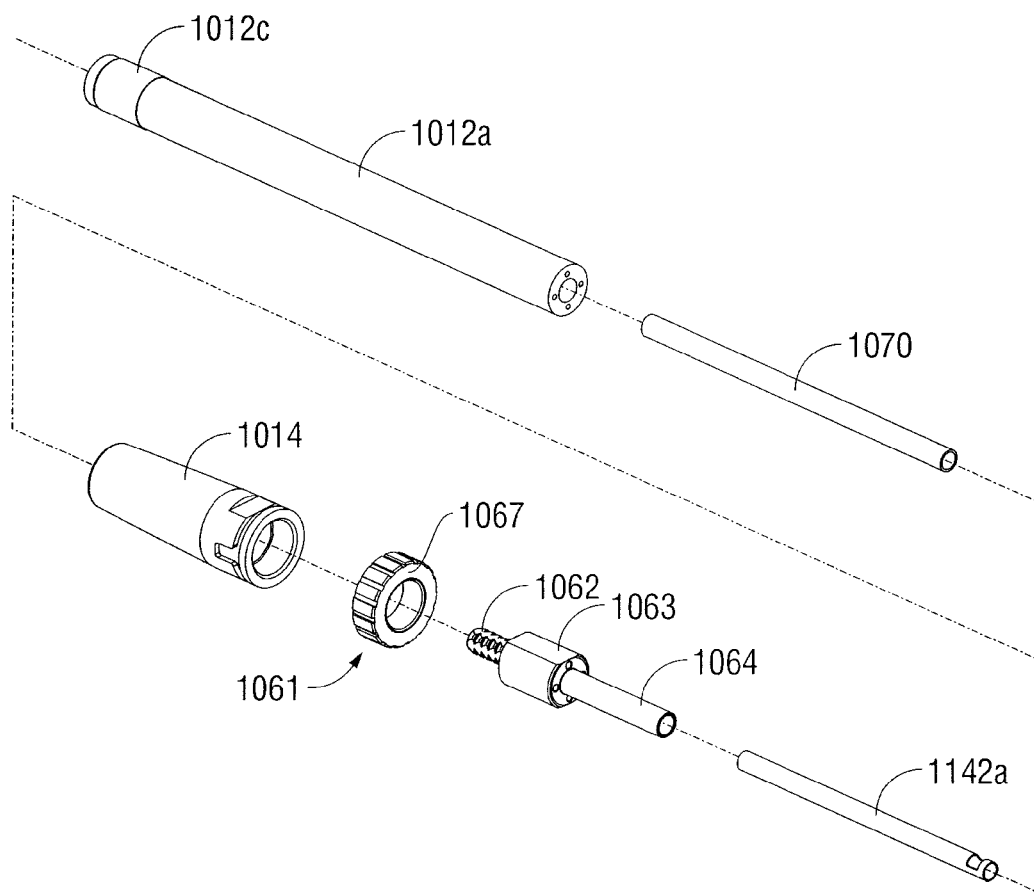


FIG. 14B

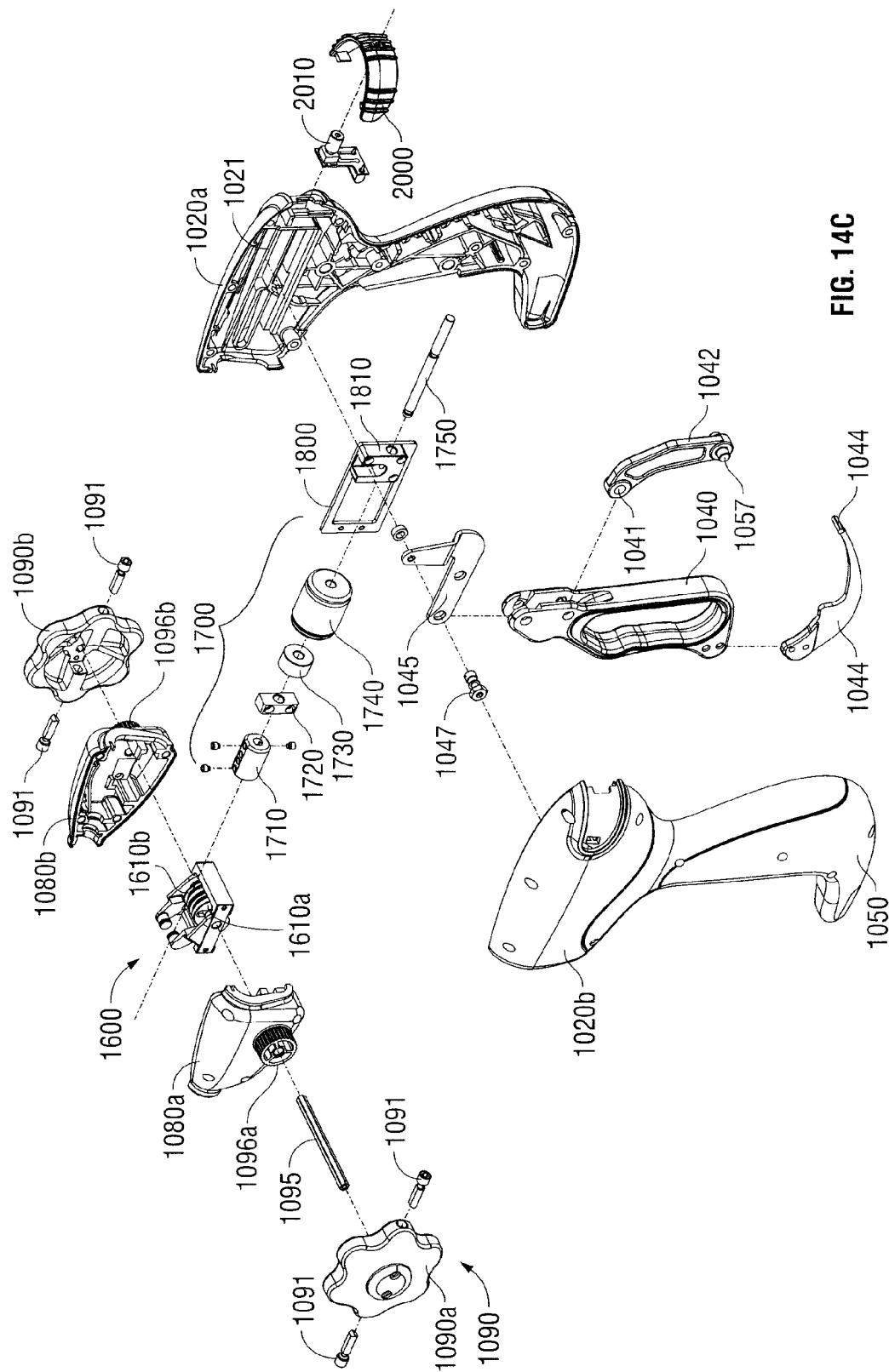


FIG. 14C

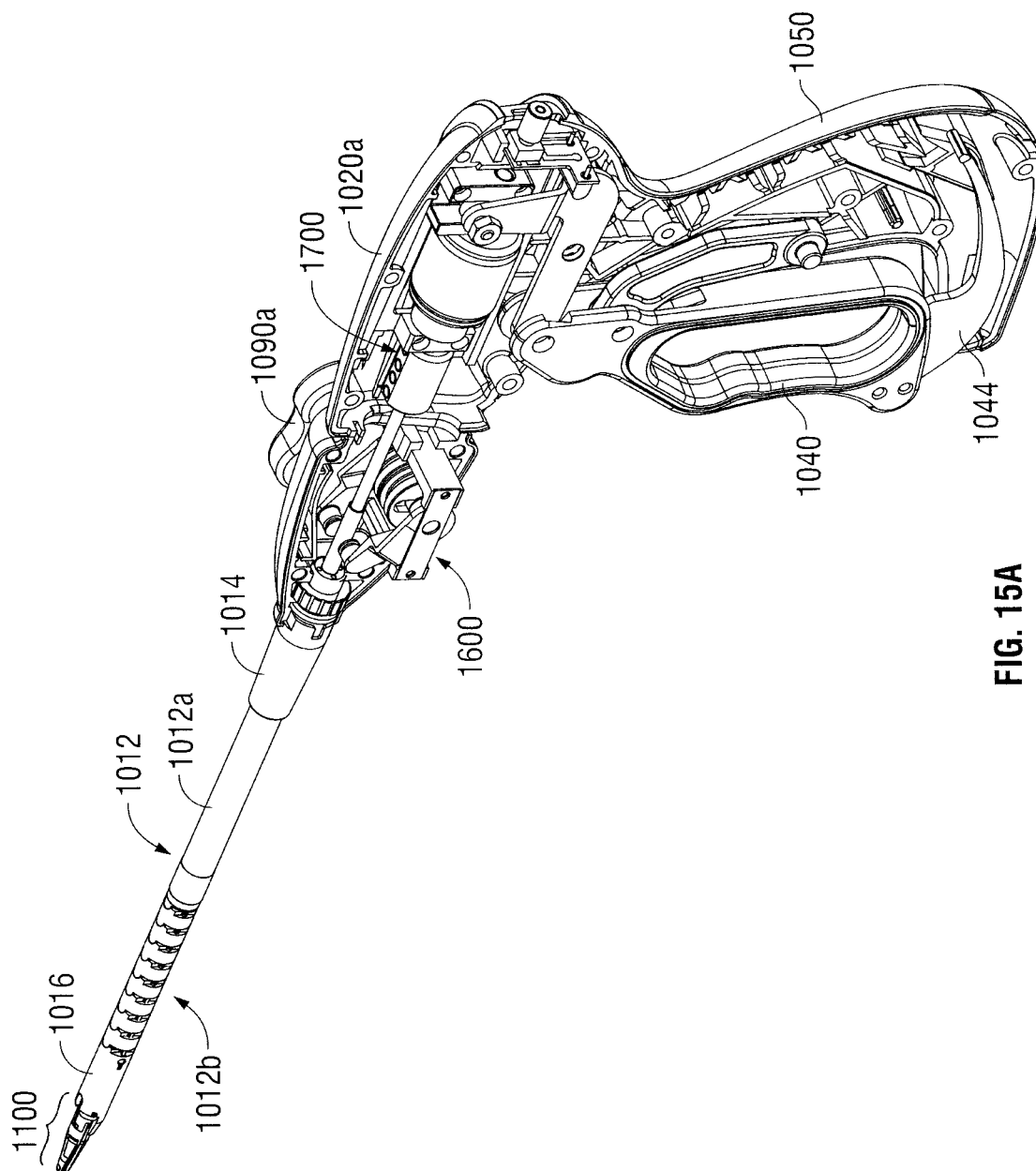


FIG. 15A

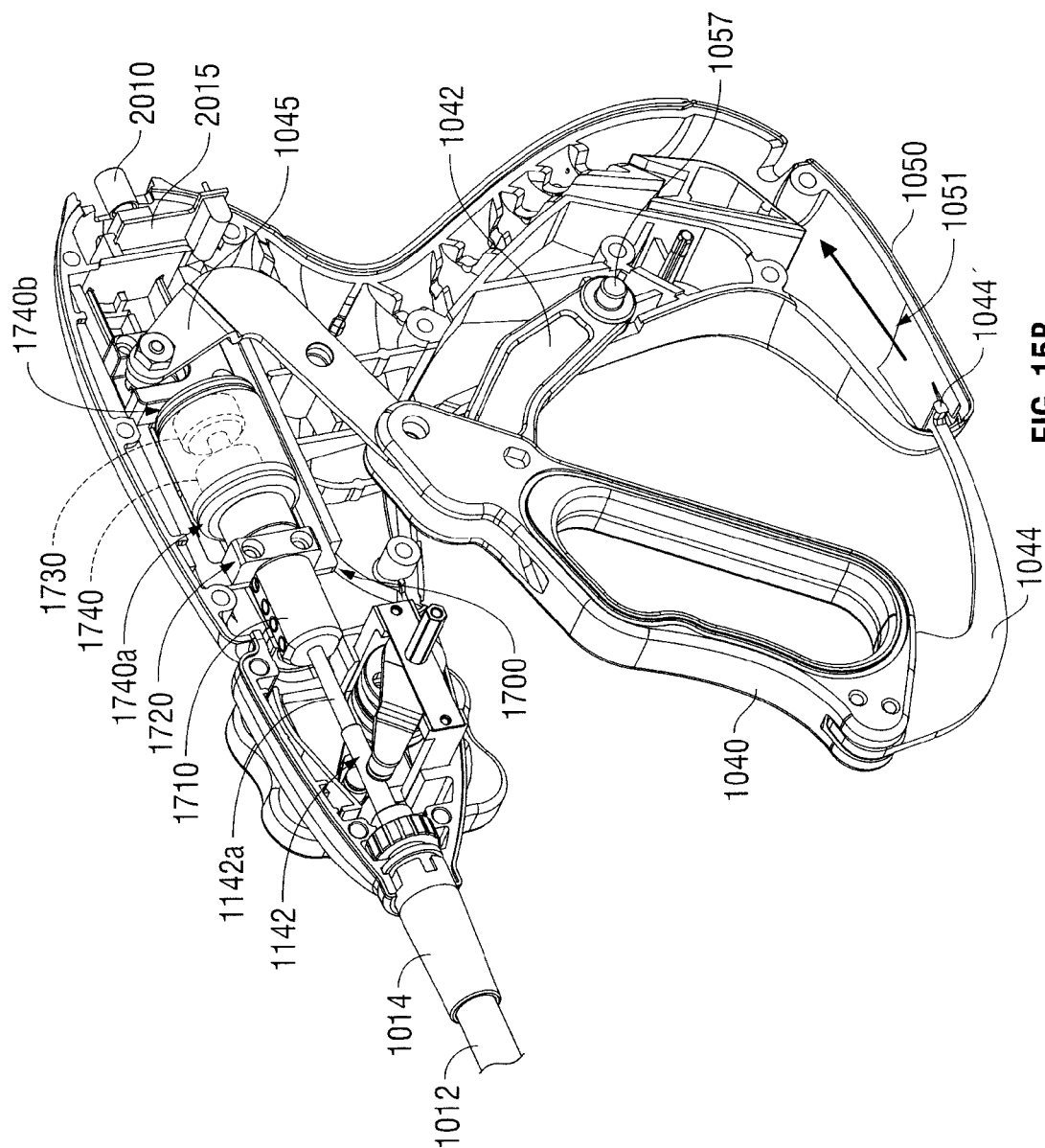


FIG. 15B

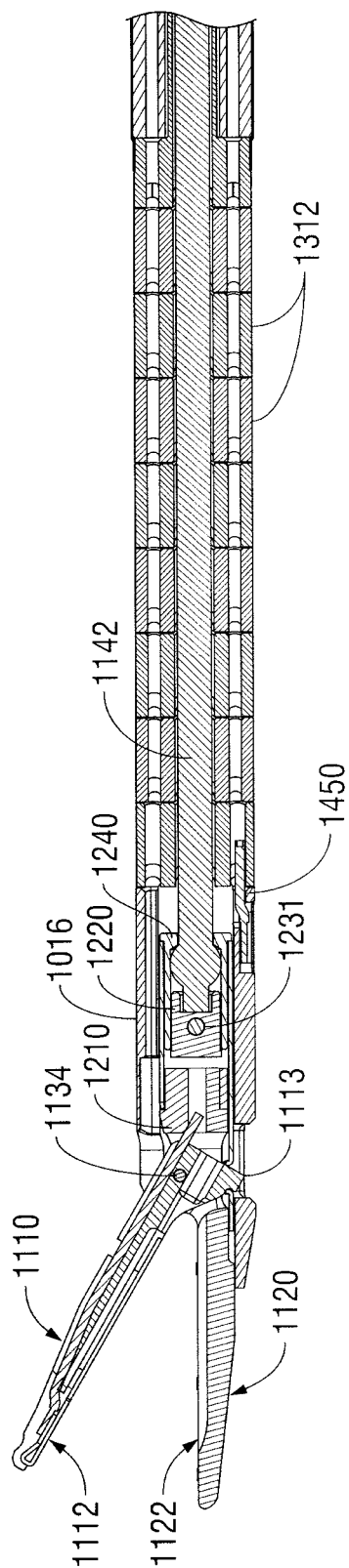


FIG. 16A

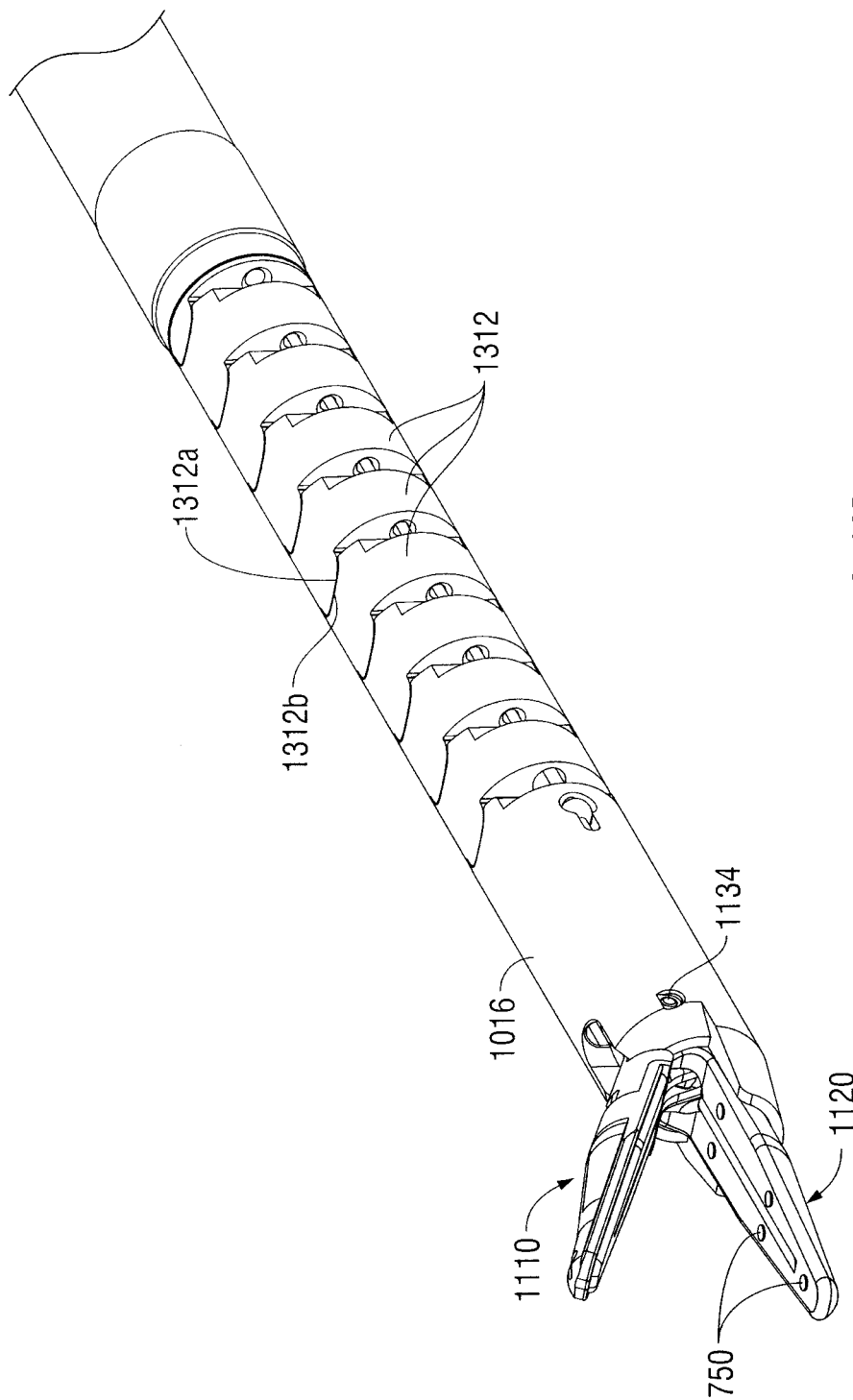


FIG. 16B

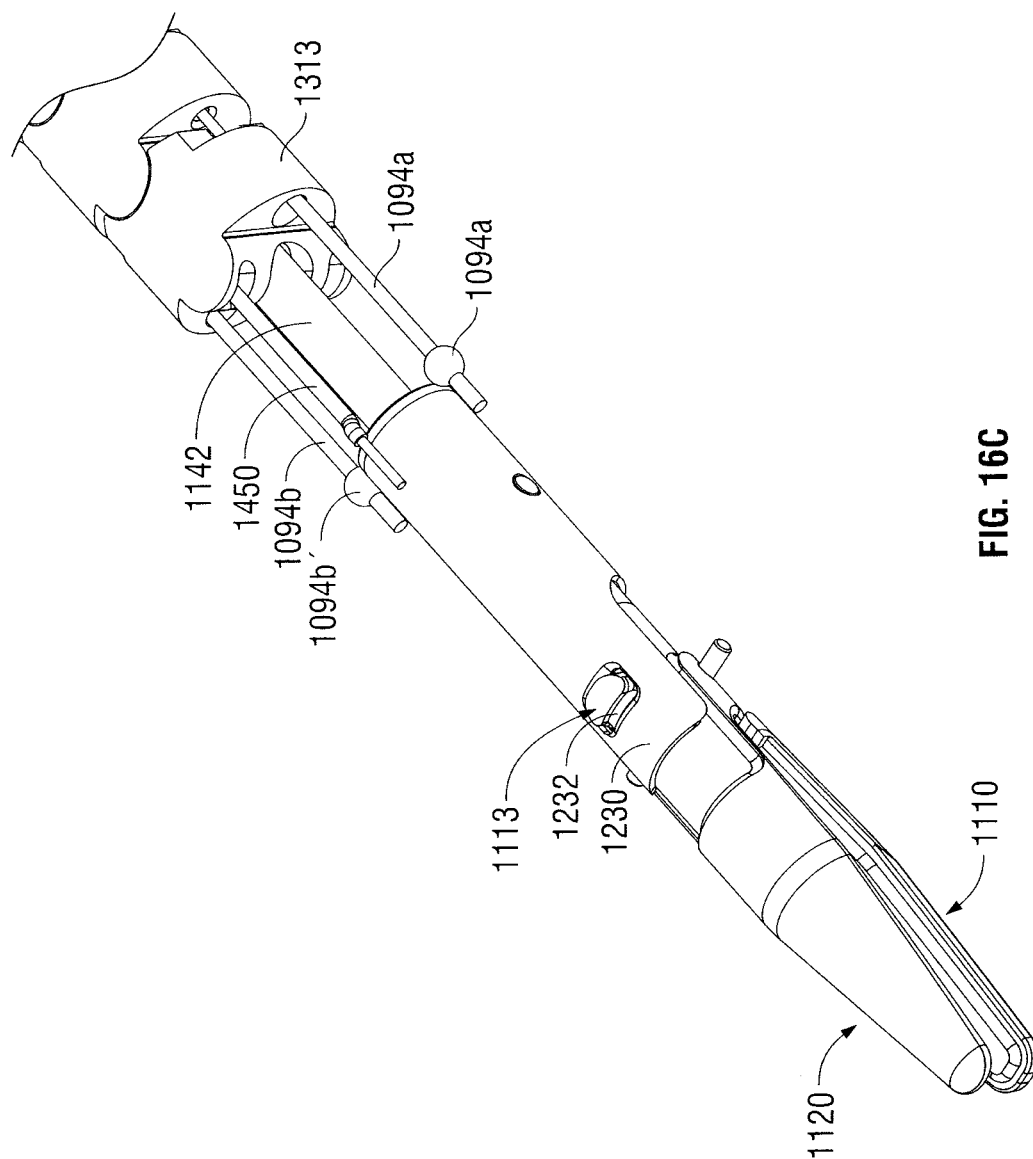


FIG. 16C

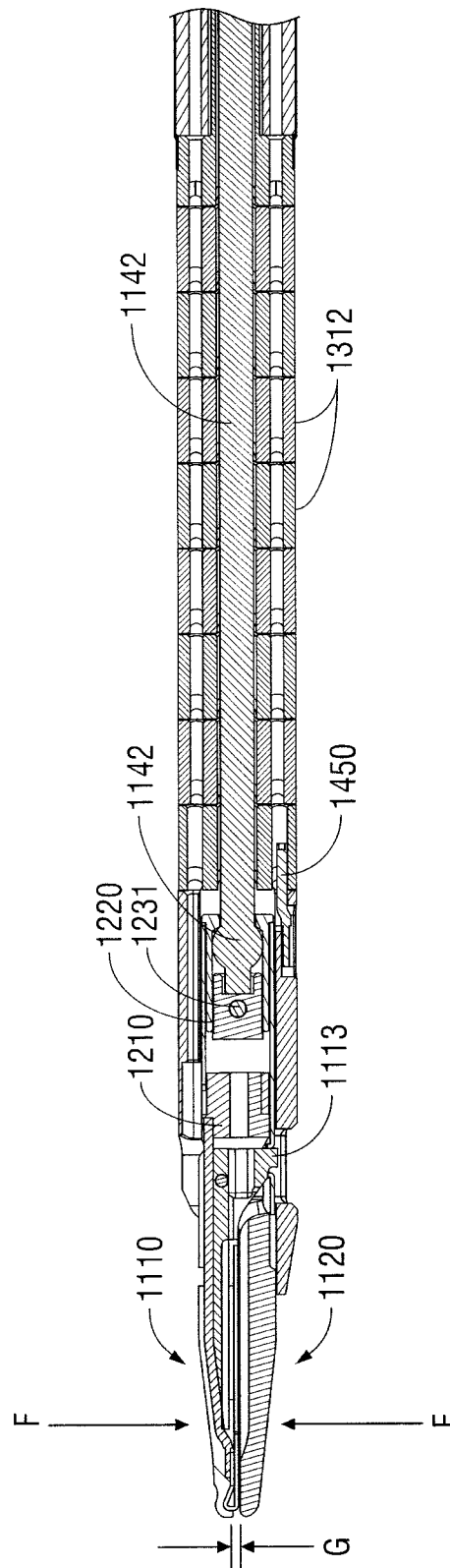


FIG. 17A

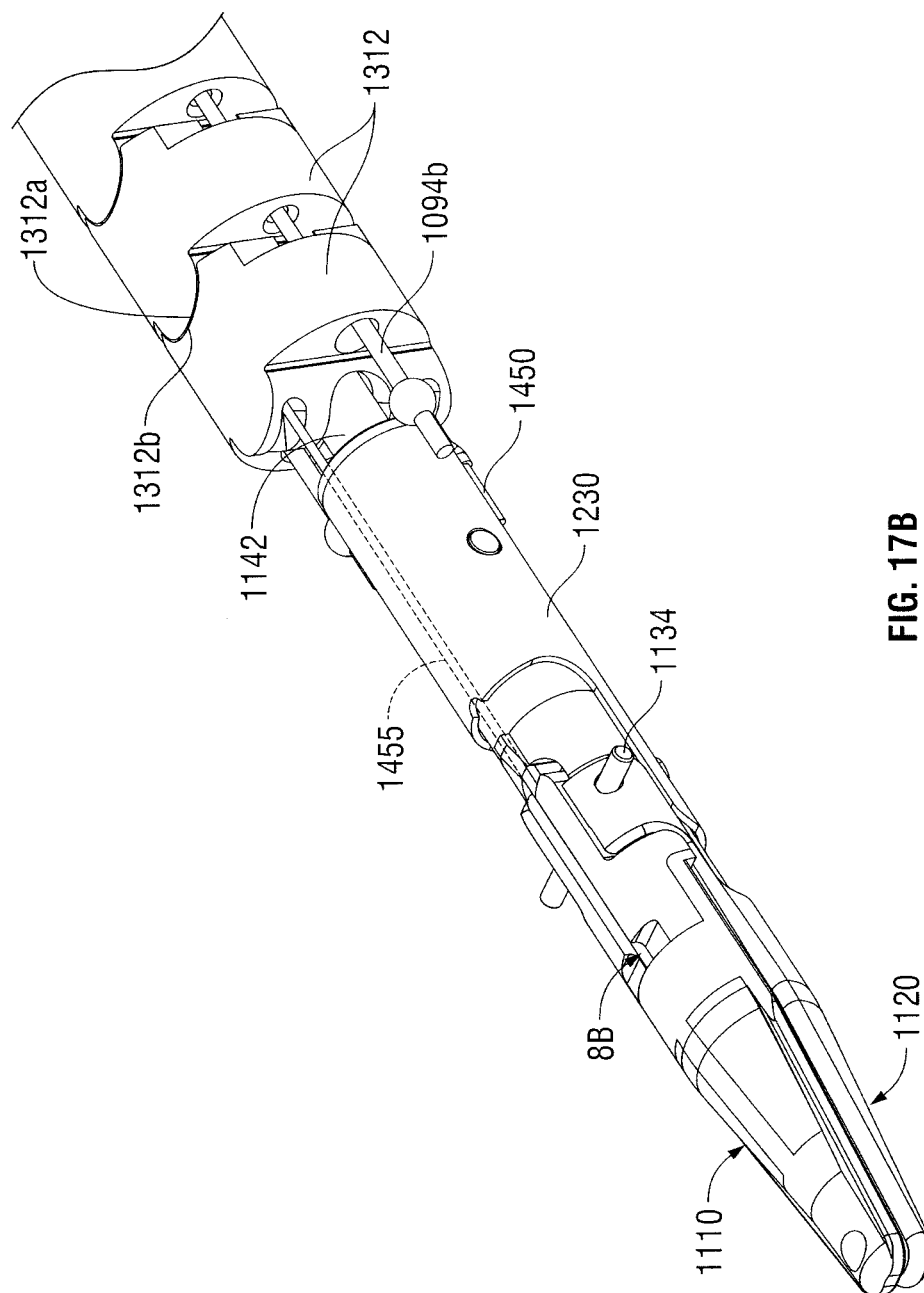


FIG. 17B

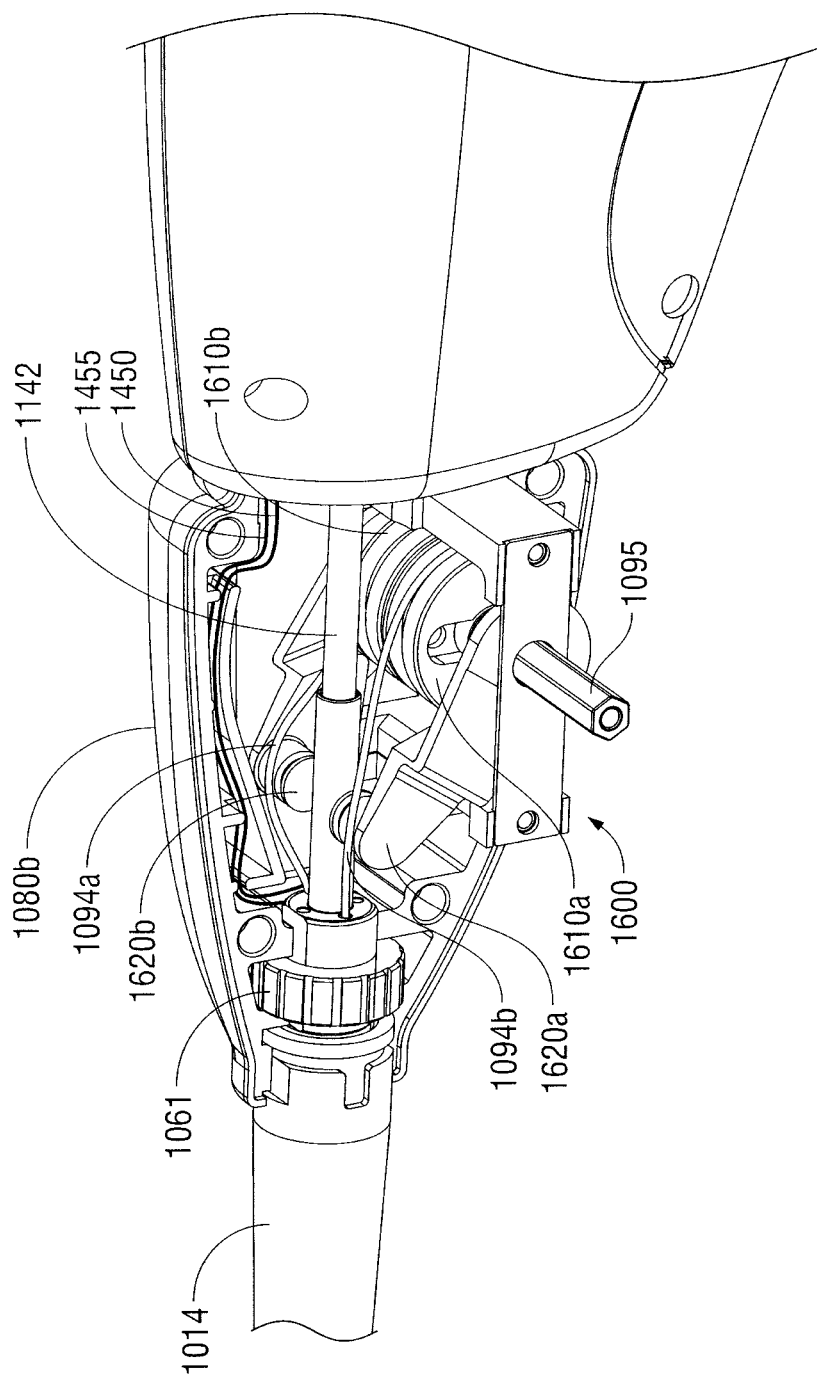


FIG. 18A

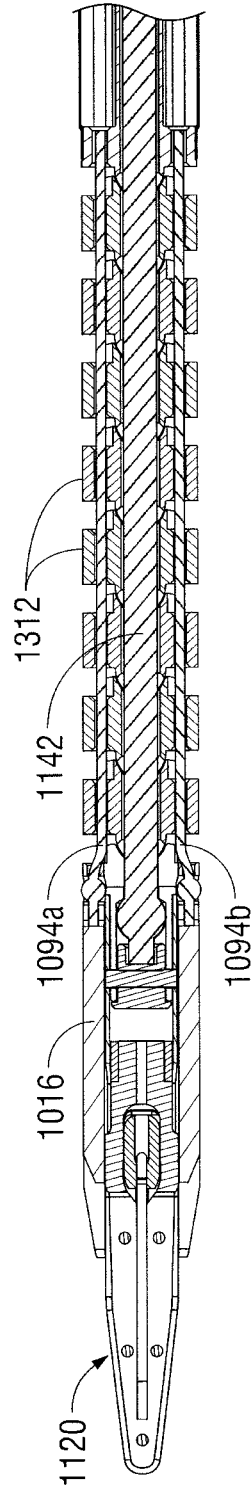


FIG. 18B

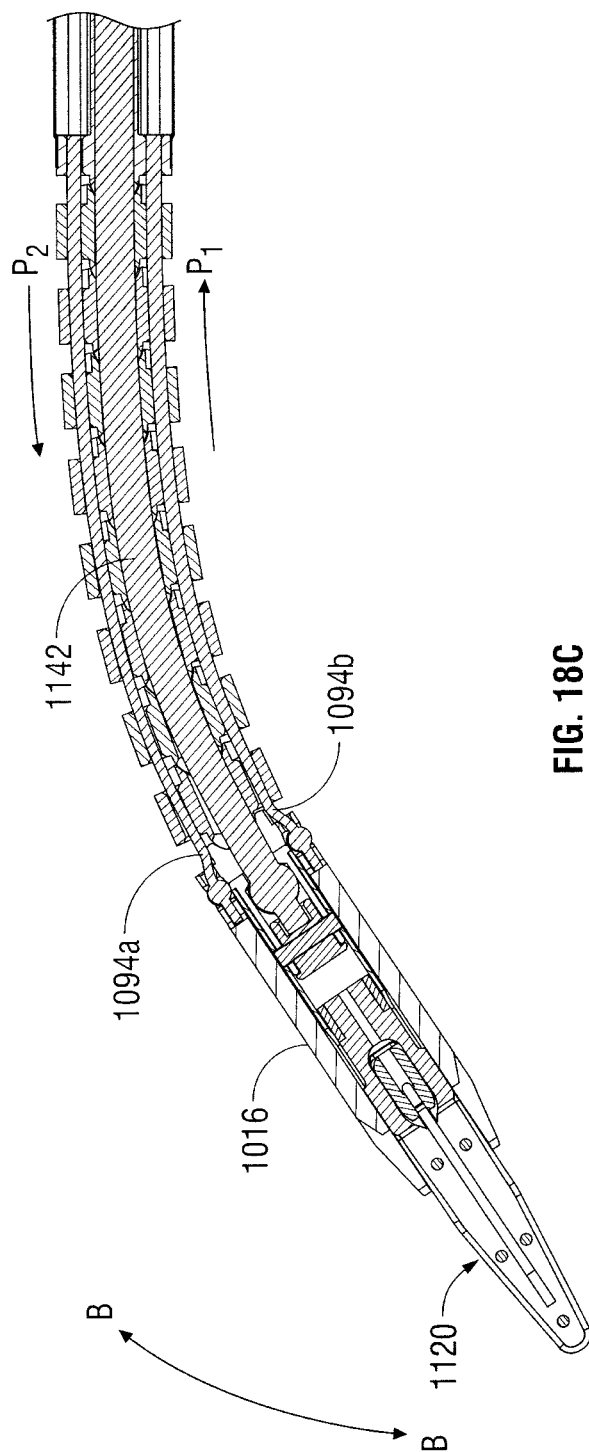


FIG. 18C

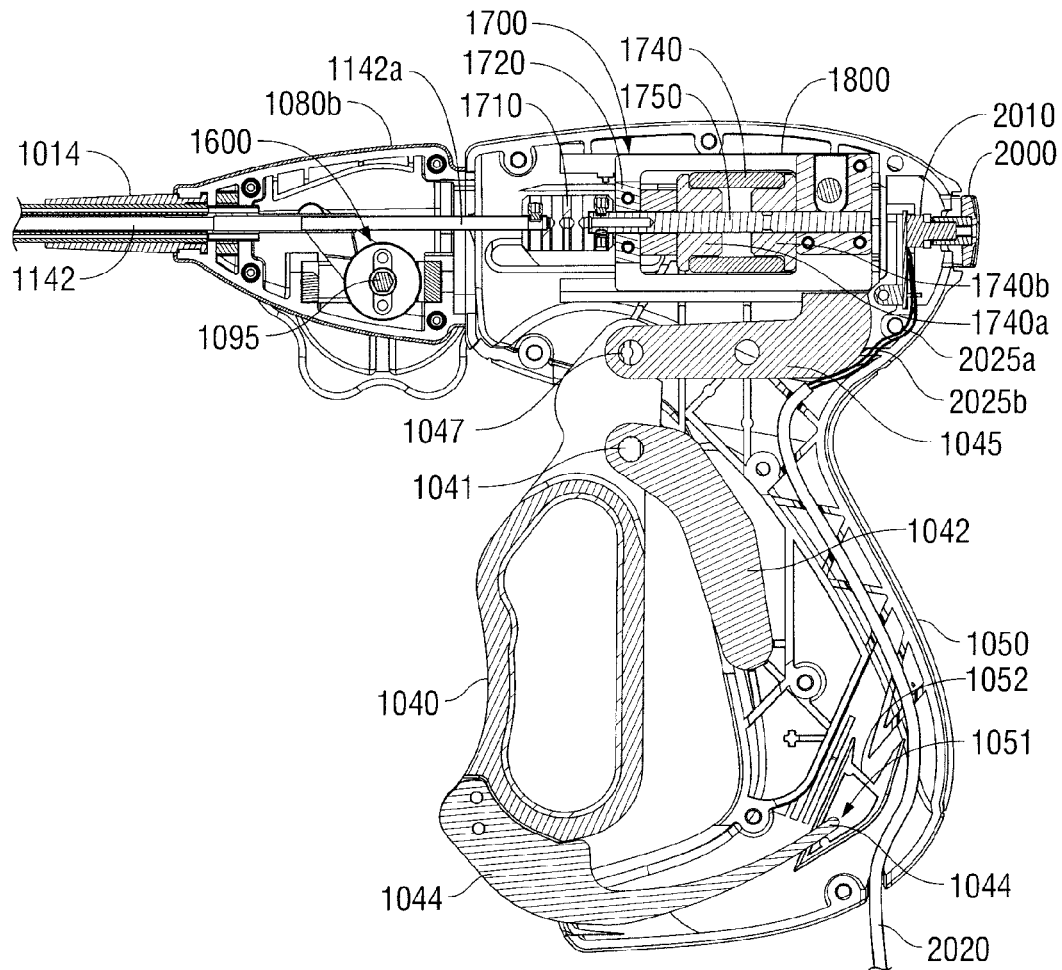


FIG. 19A

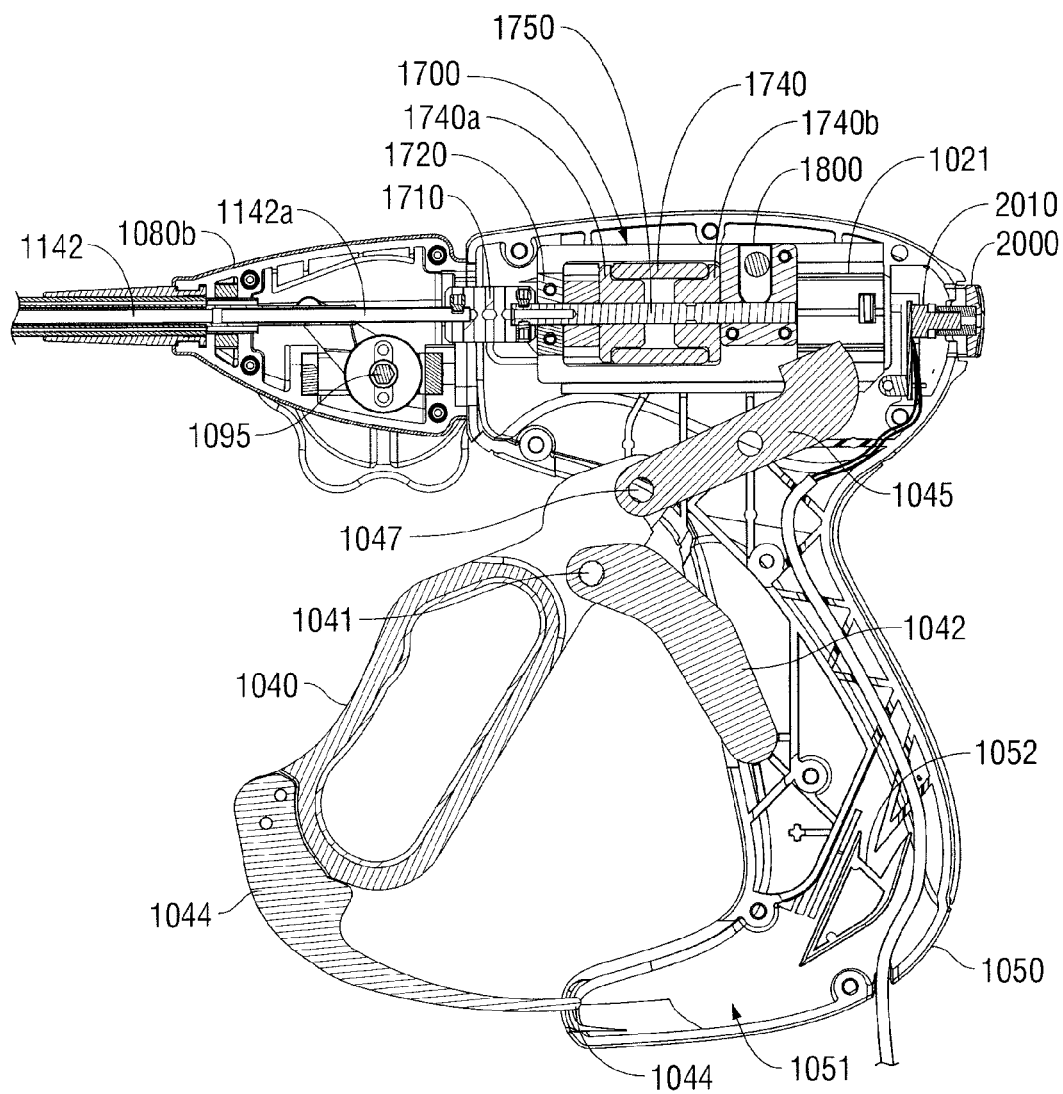


FIG. 19B

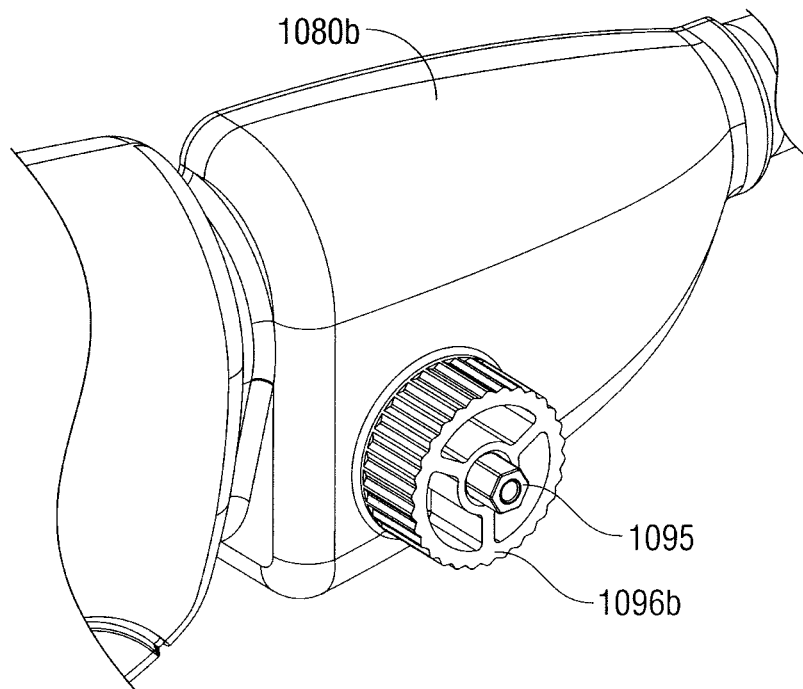


FIG. 20A

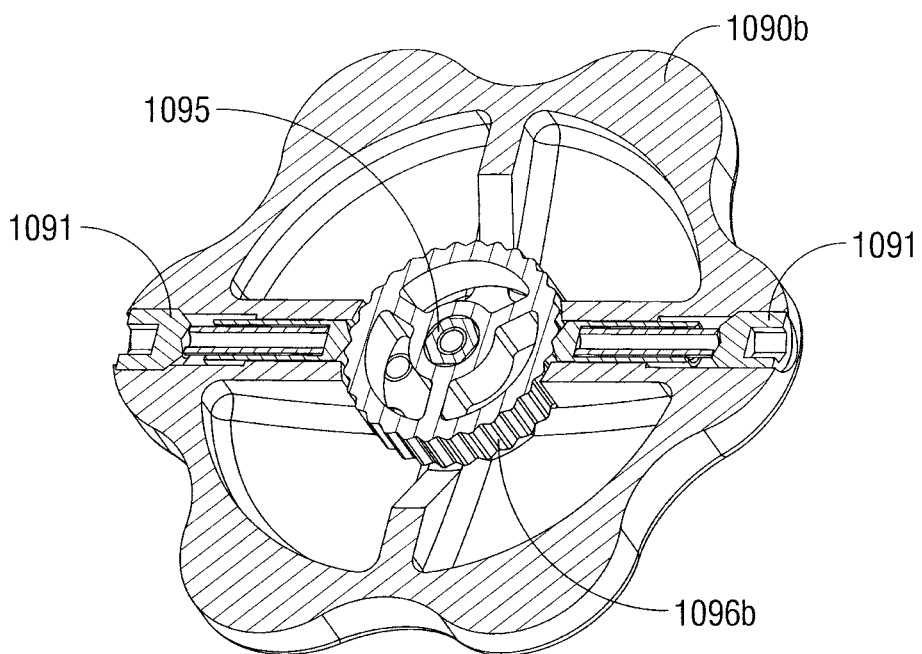


FIG. 20B

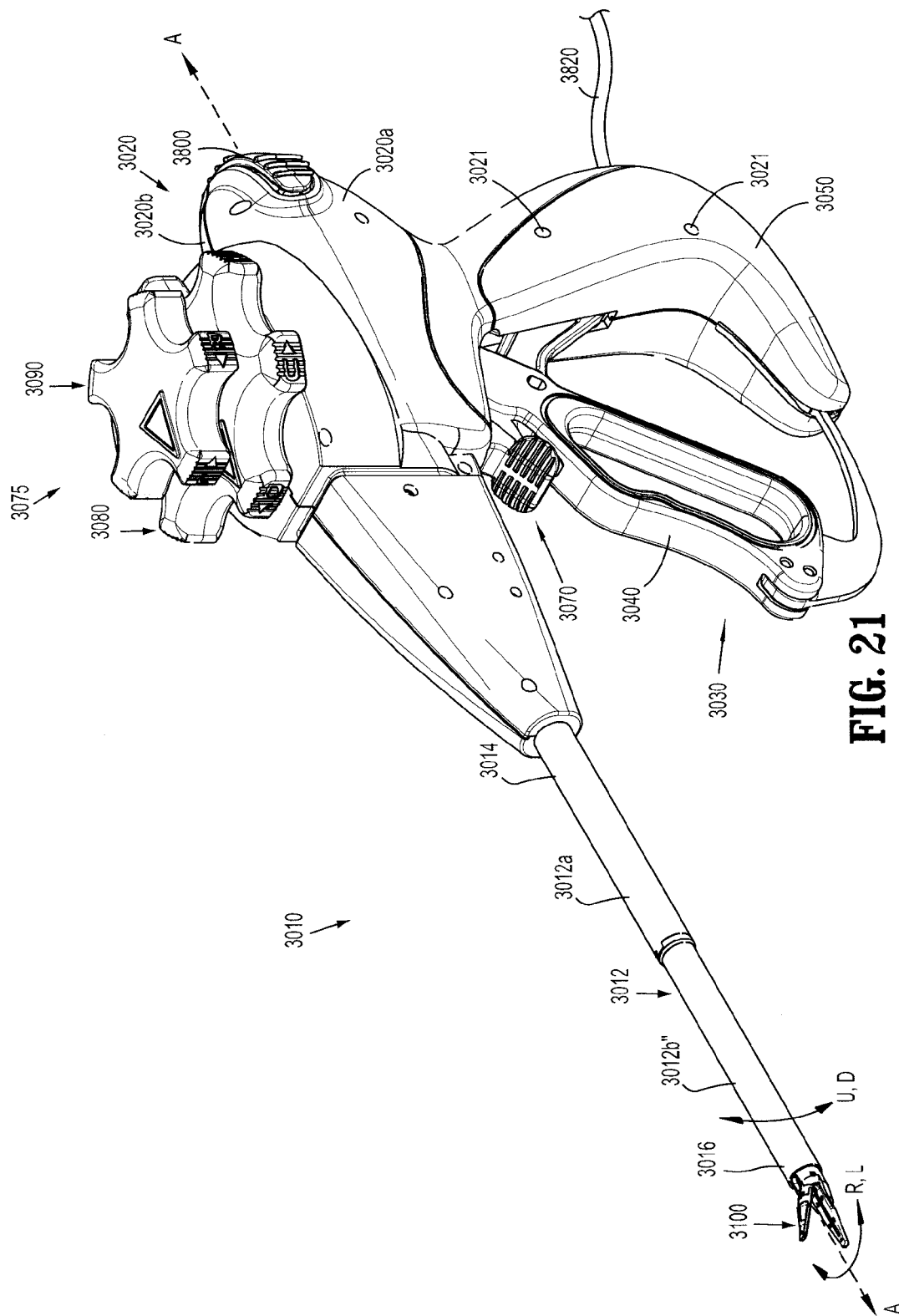


FIG. 21

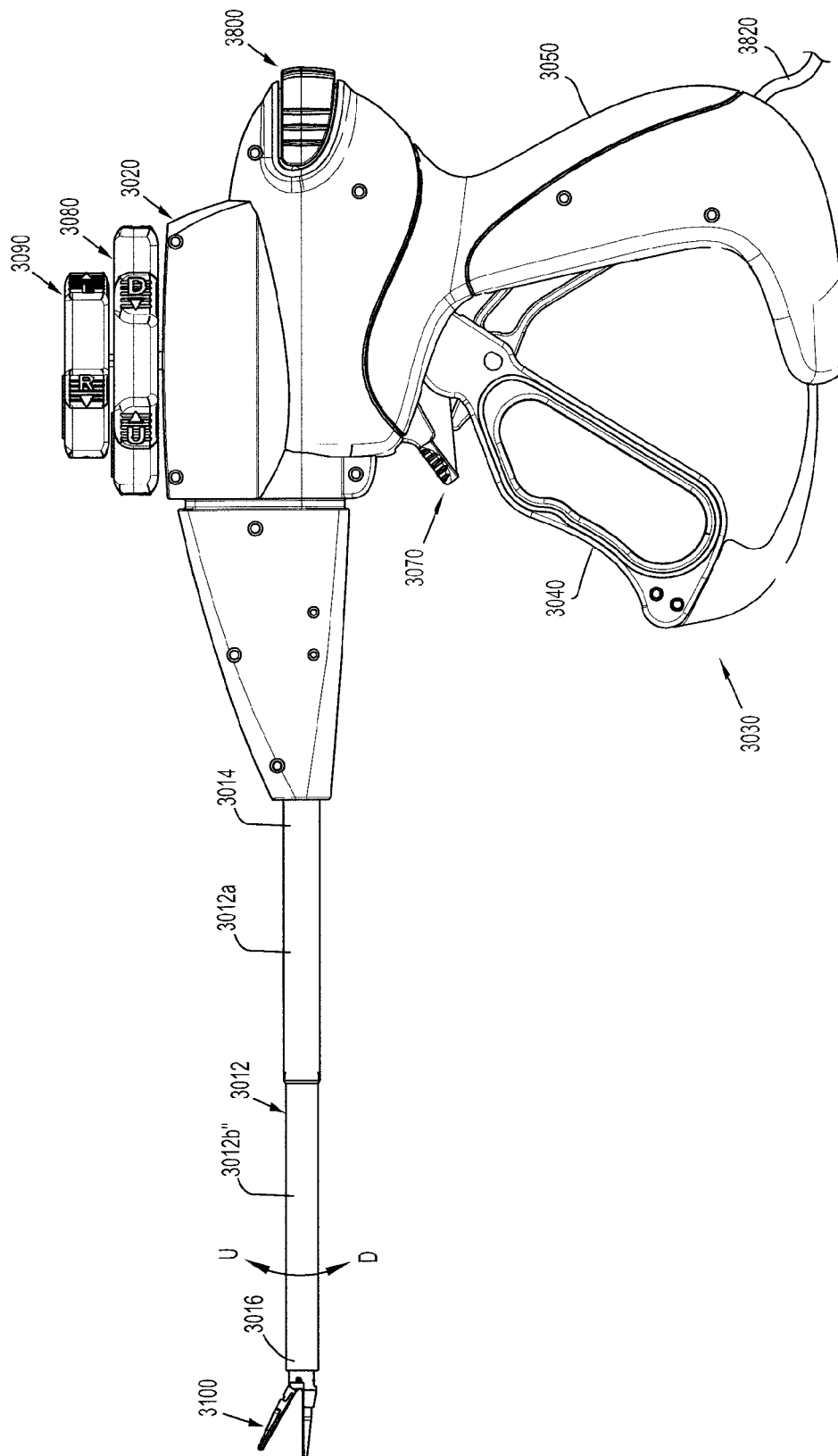


FIG. 22

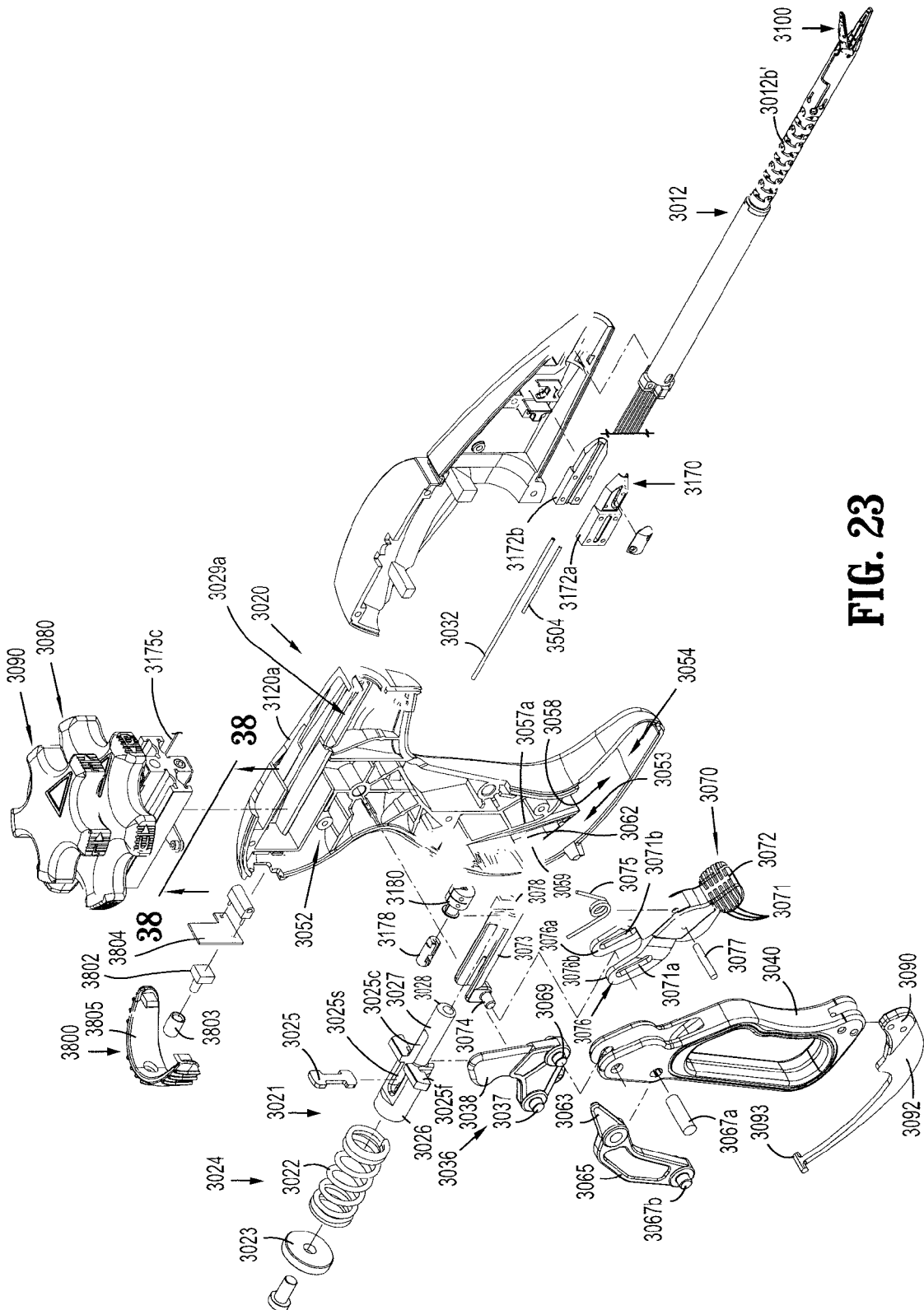


FIG. 23

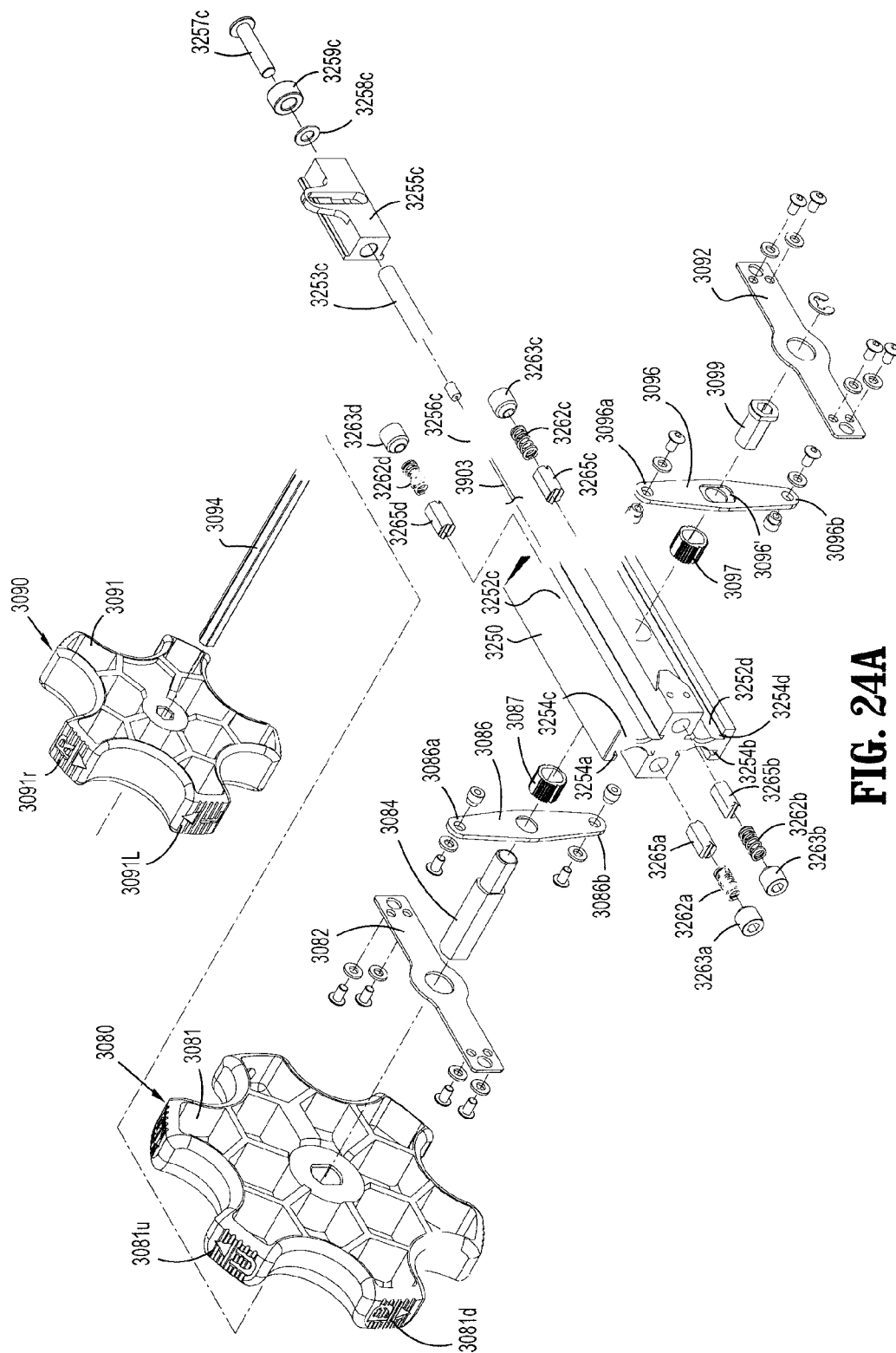


FIG. 24A

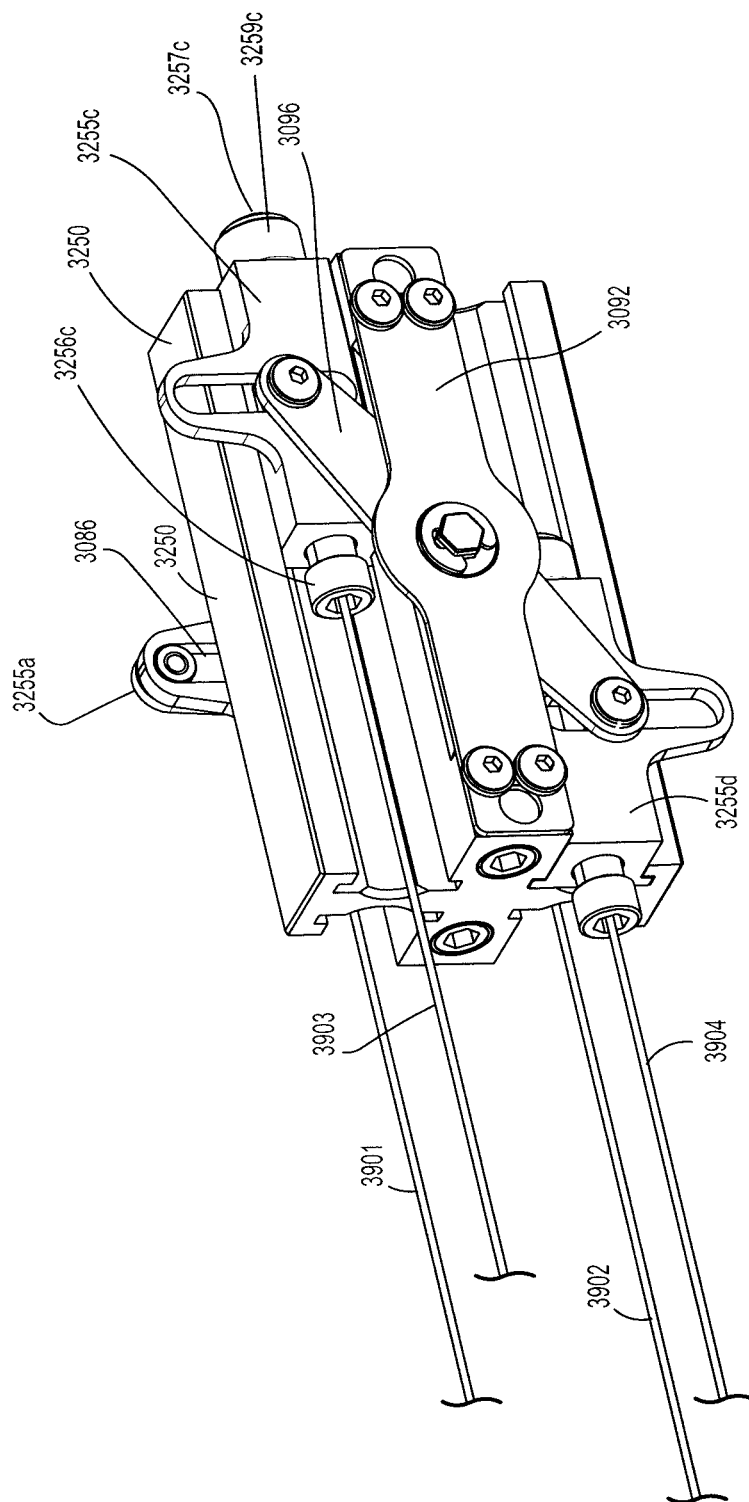


FIG. 24B

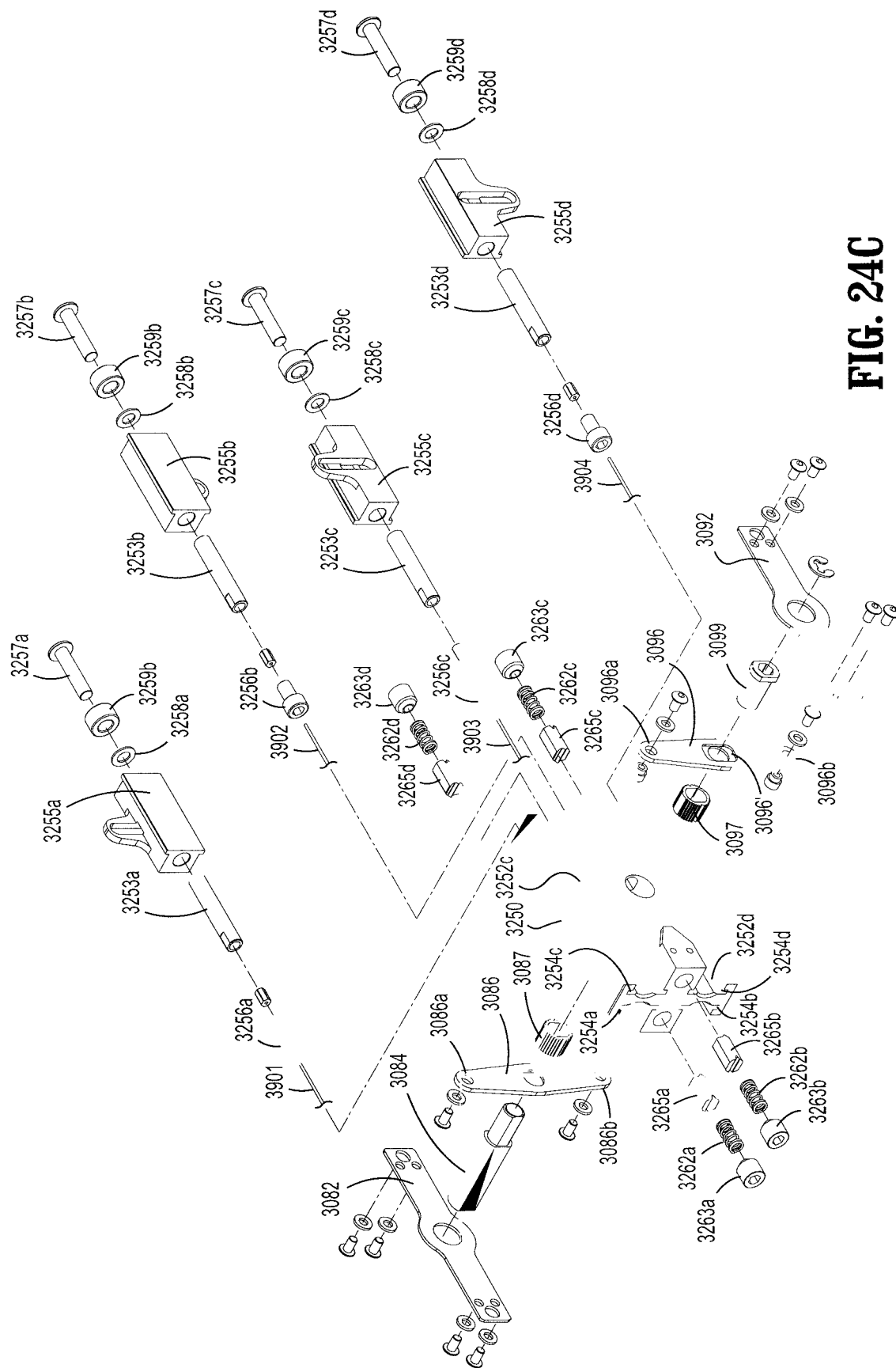


FIG. 24C

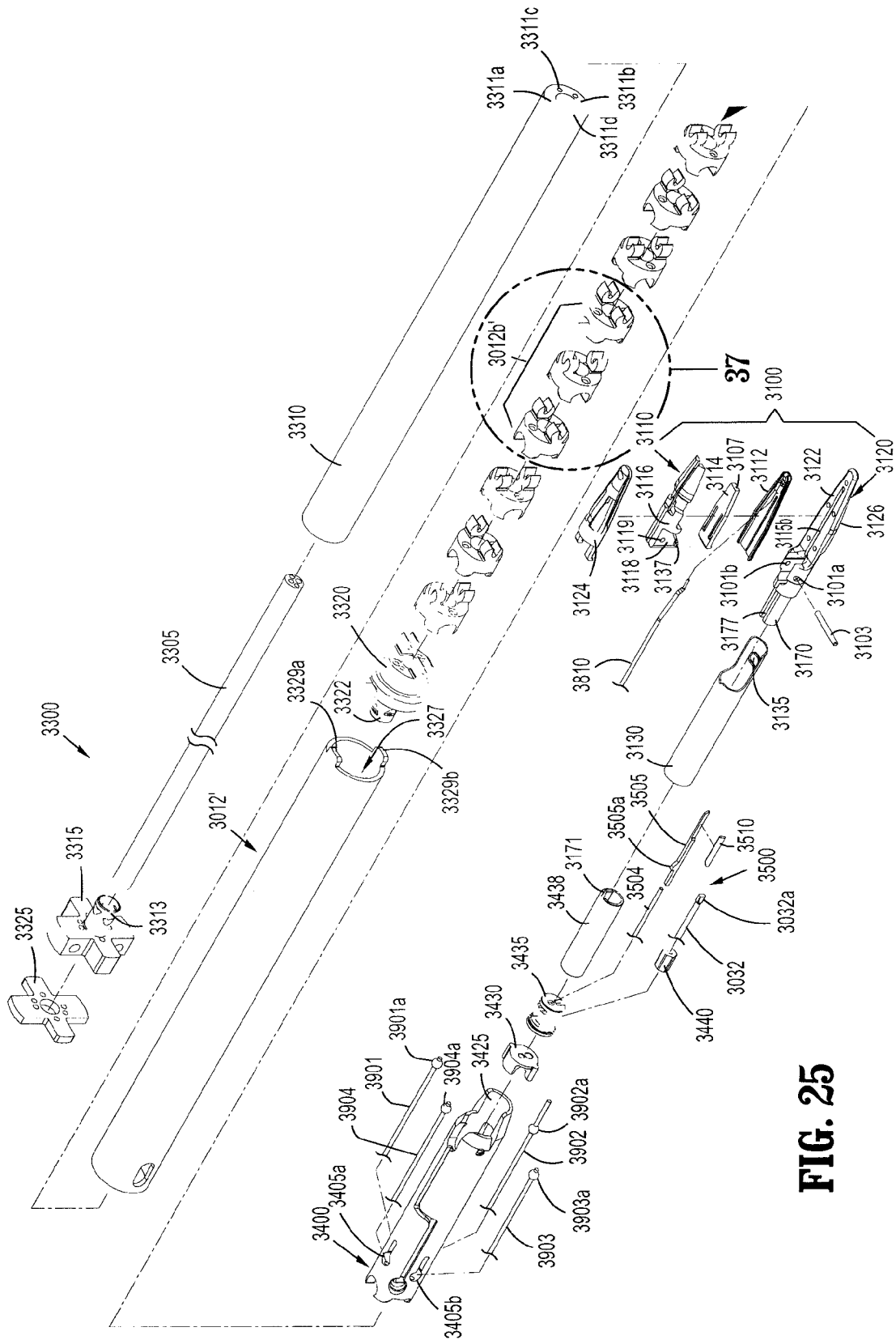
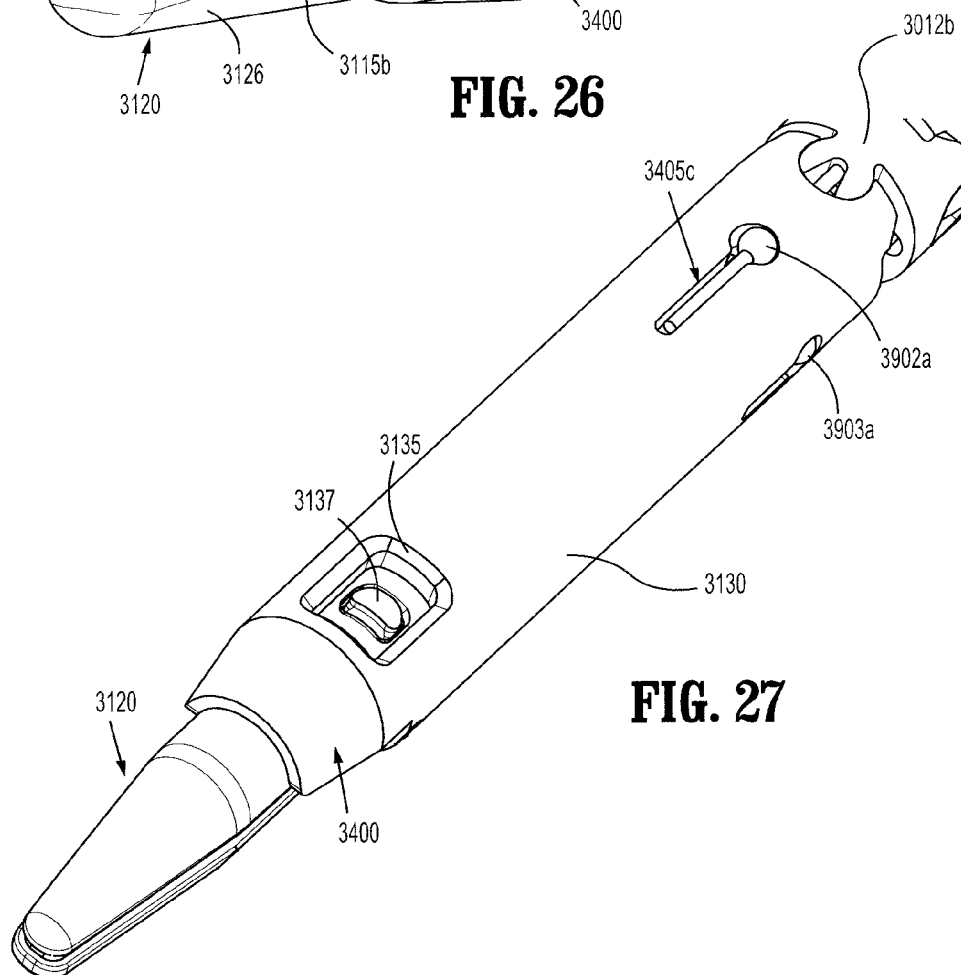
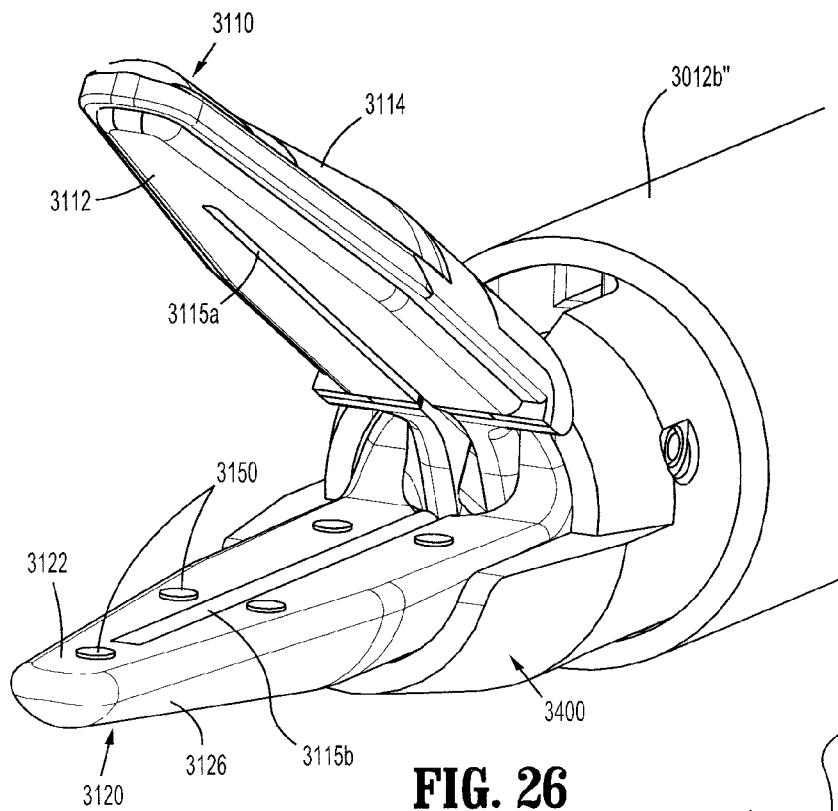


FIG. 25



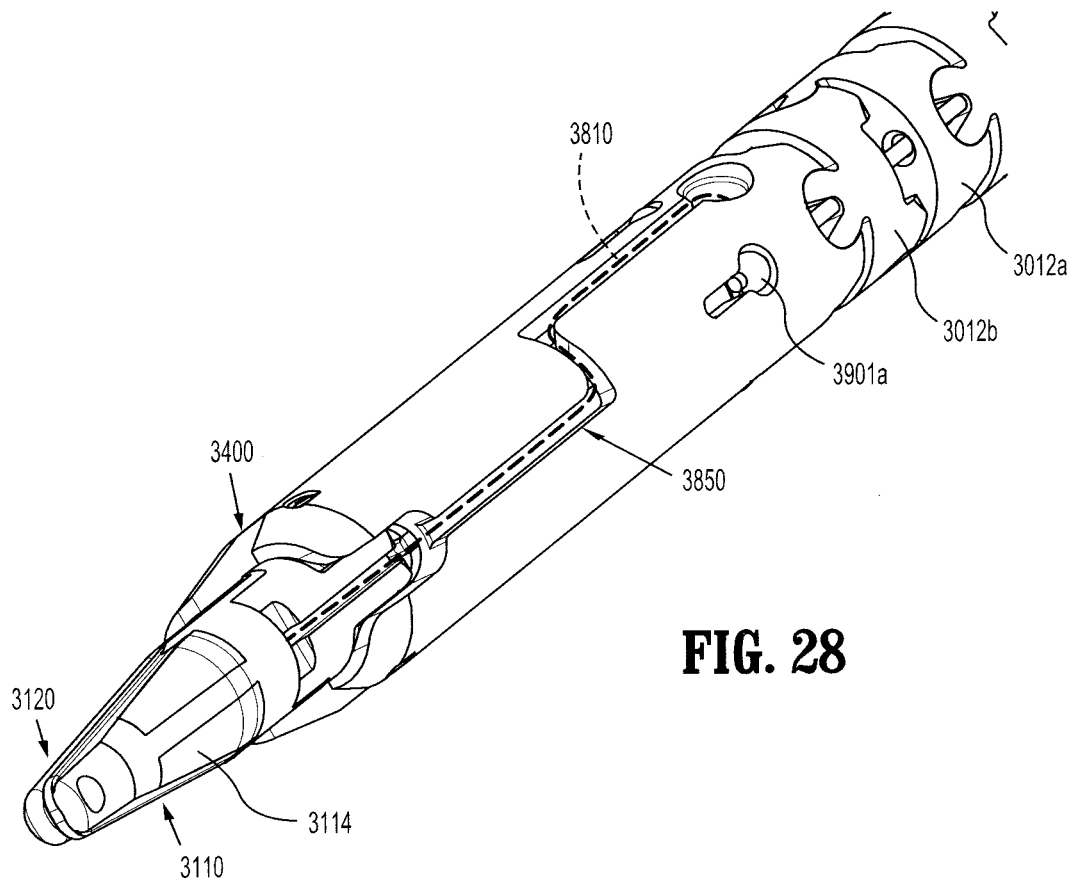


FIG. 28

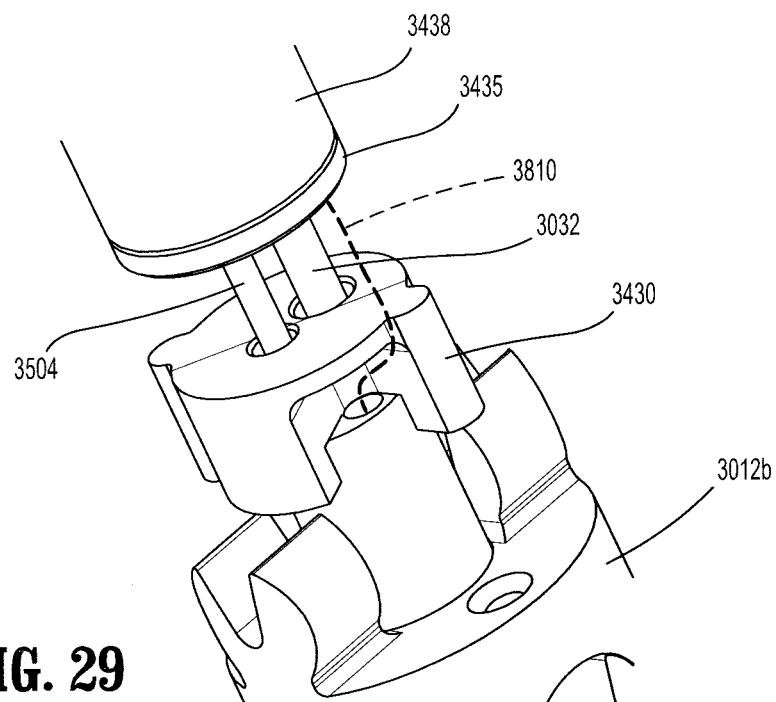


FIG. 29

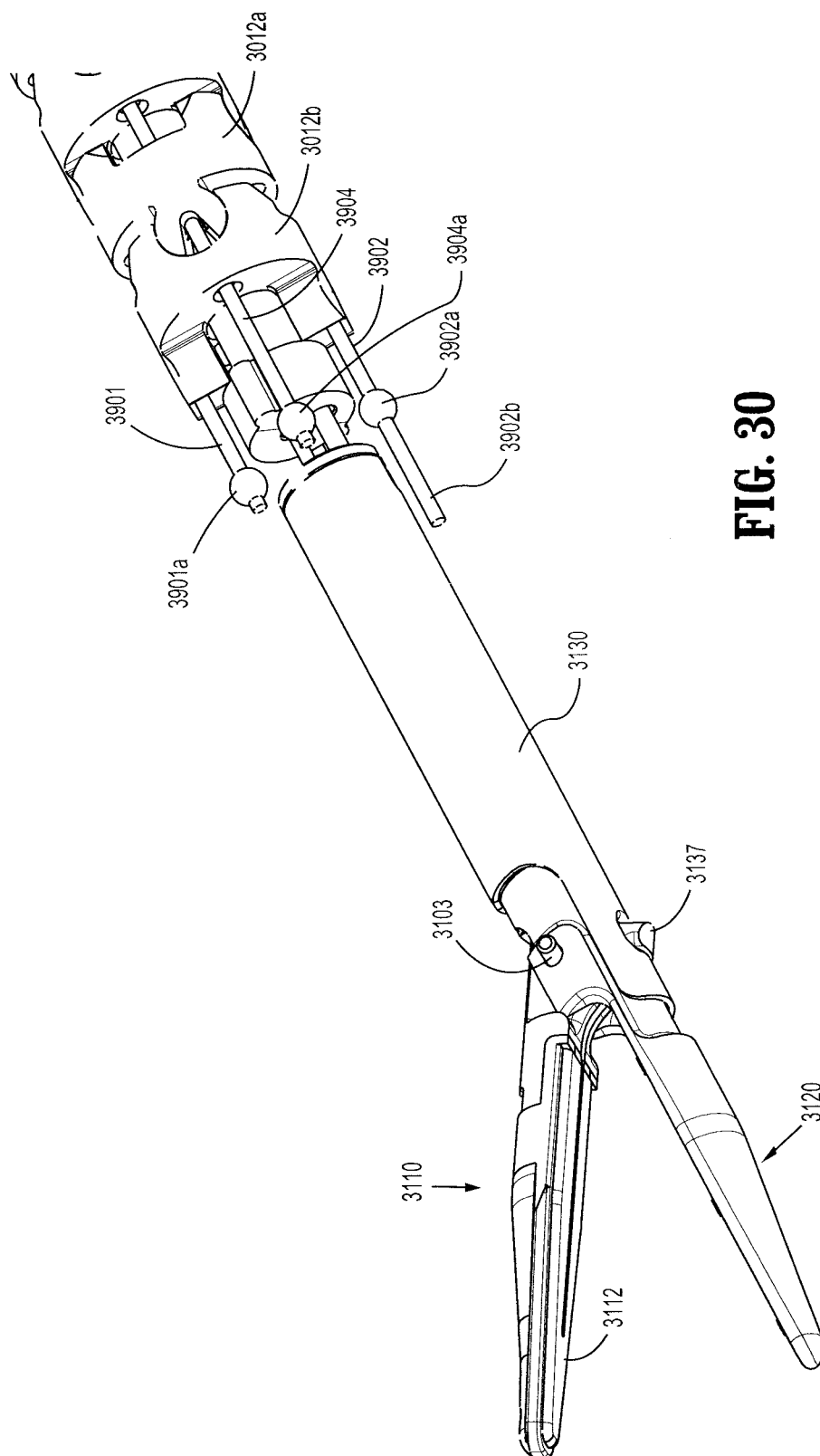
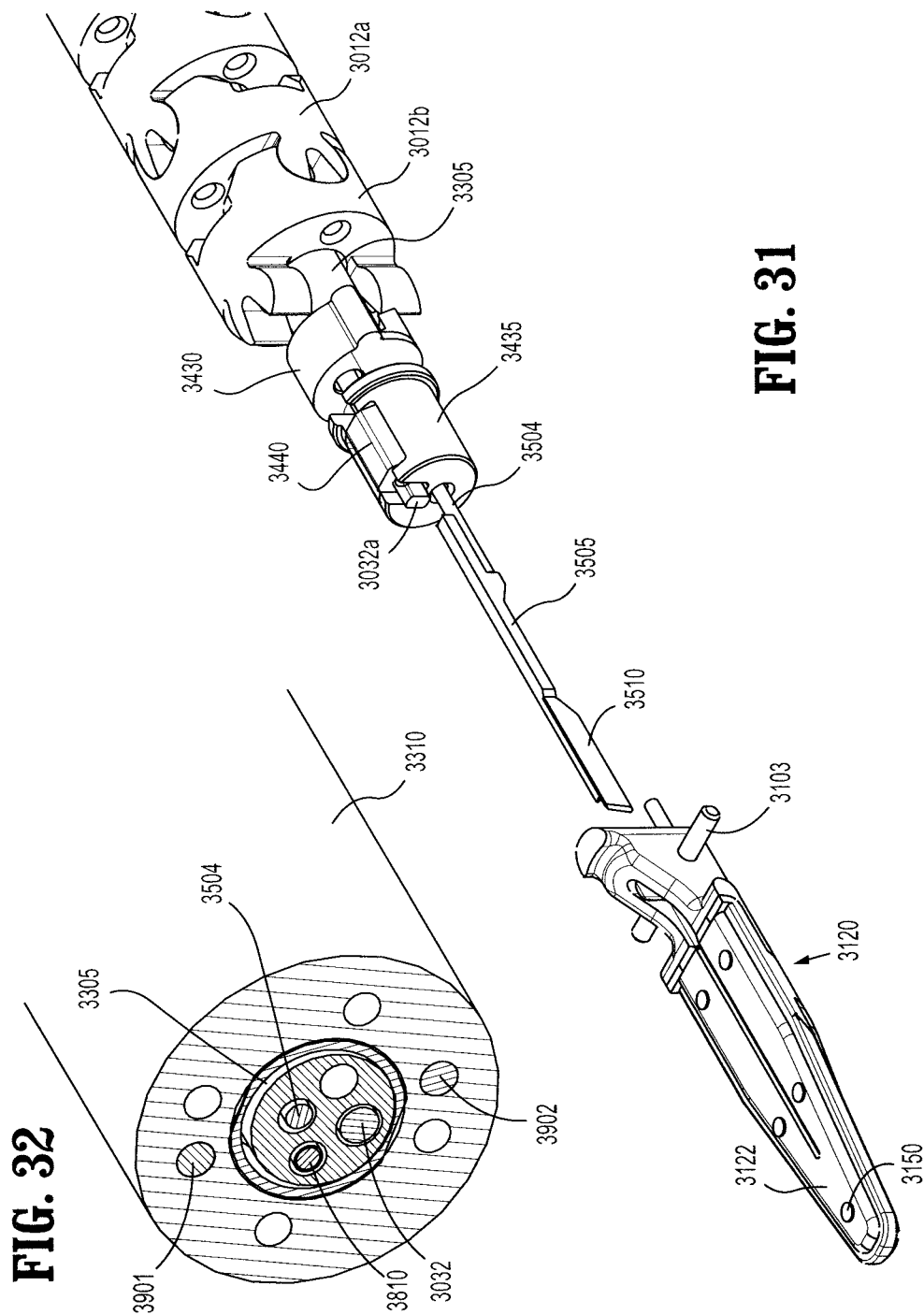


FIG. 30



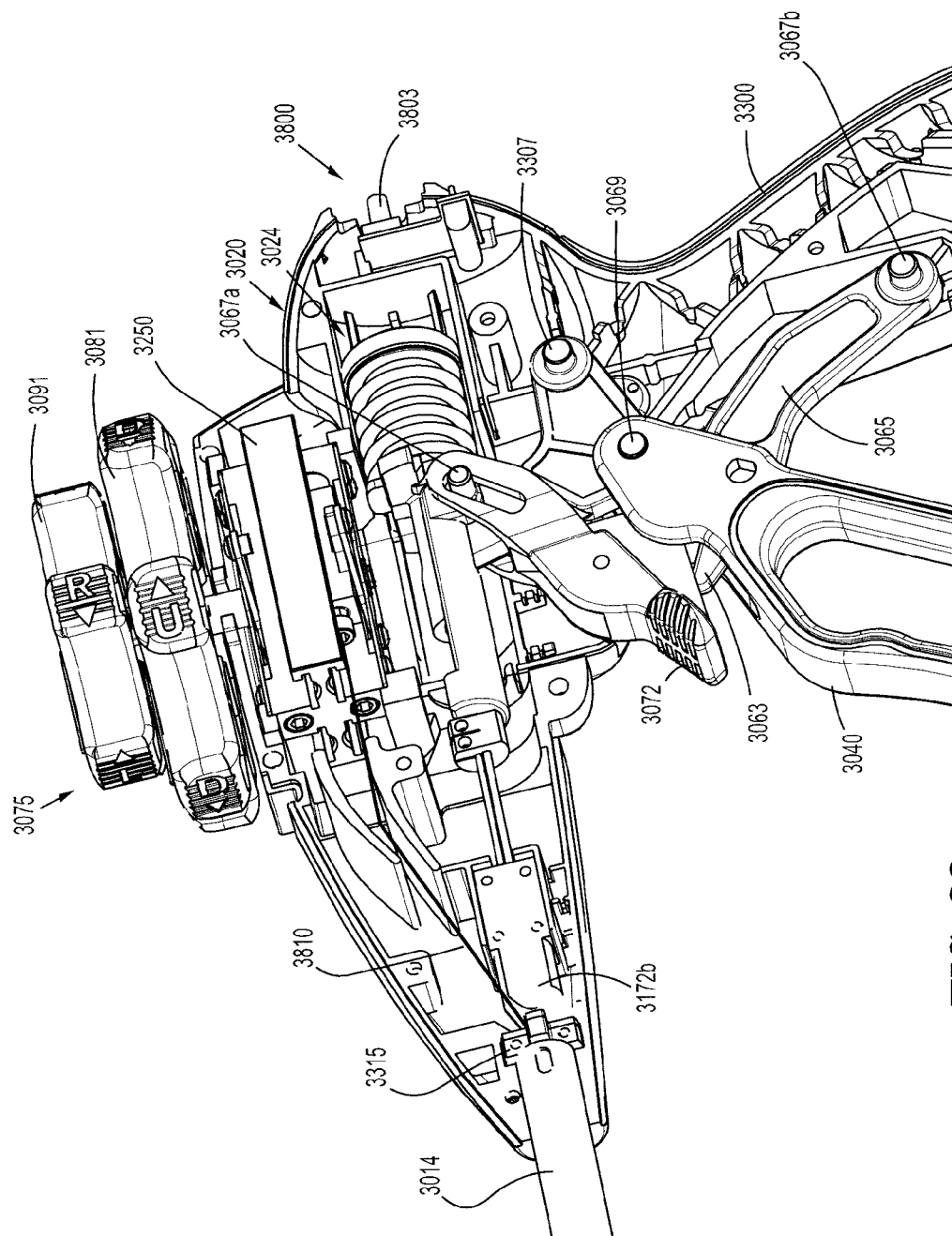


FIG. 33

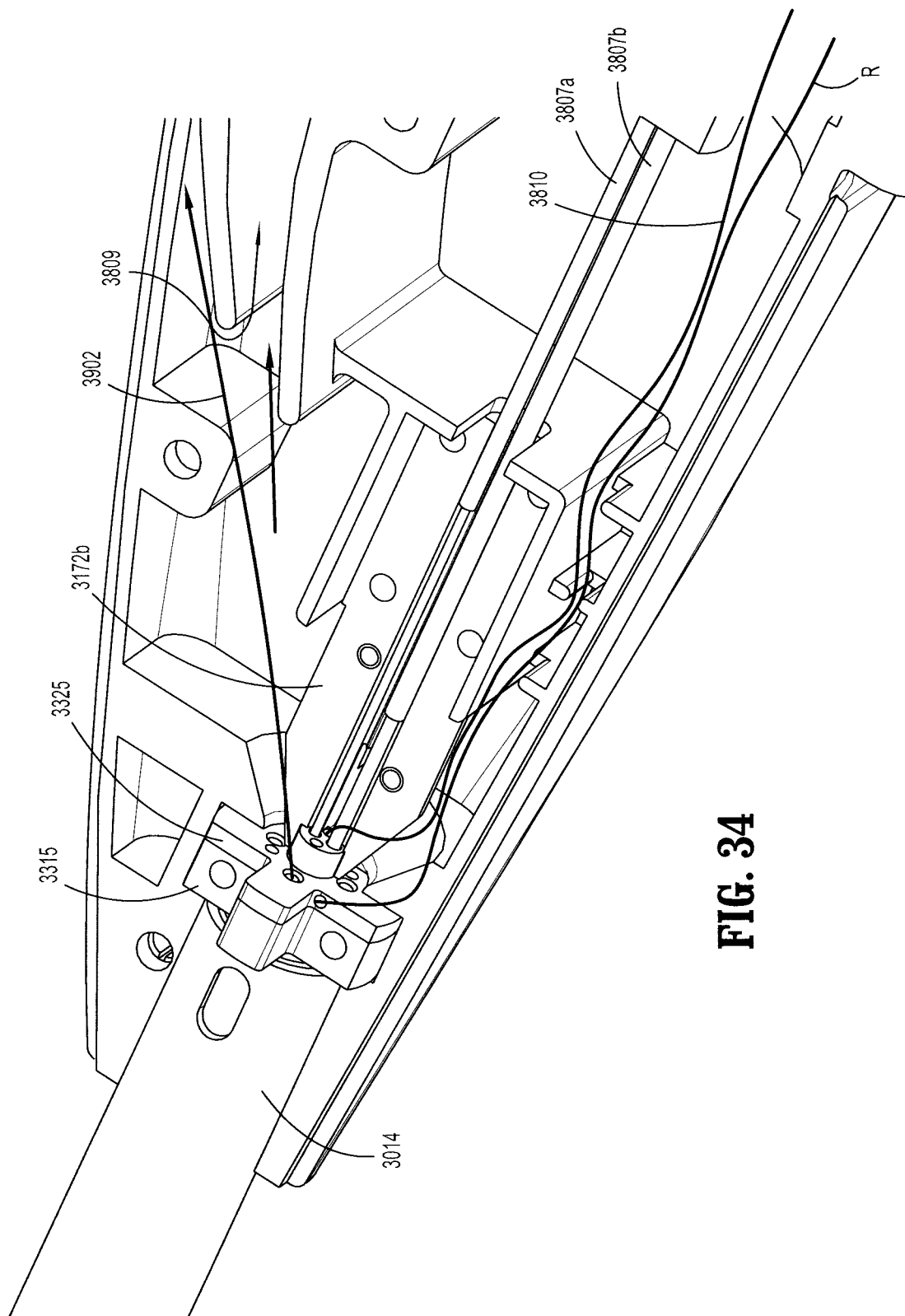


FIG. 34

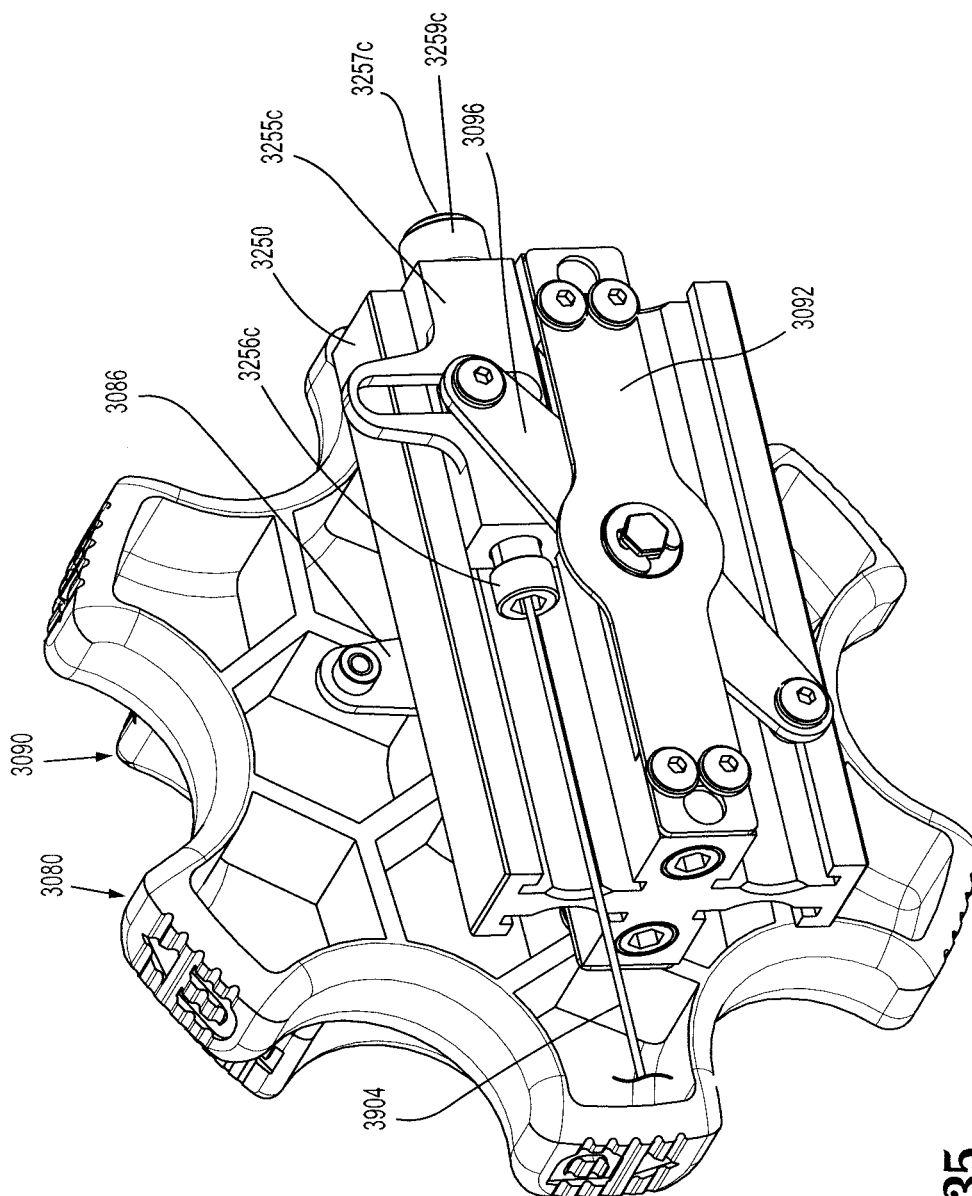


FIG. 35

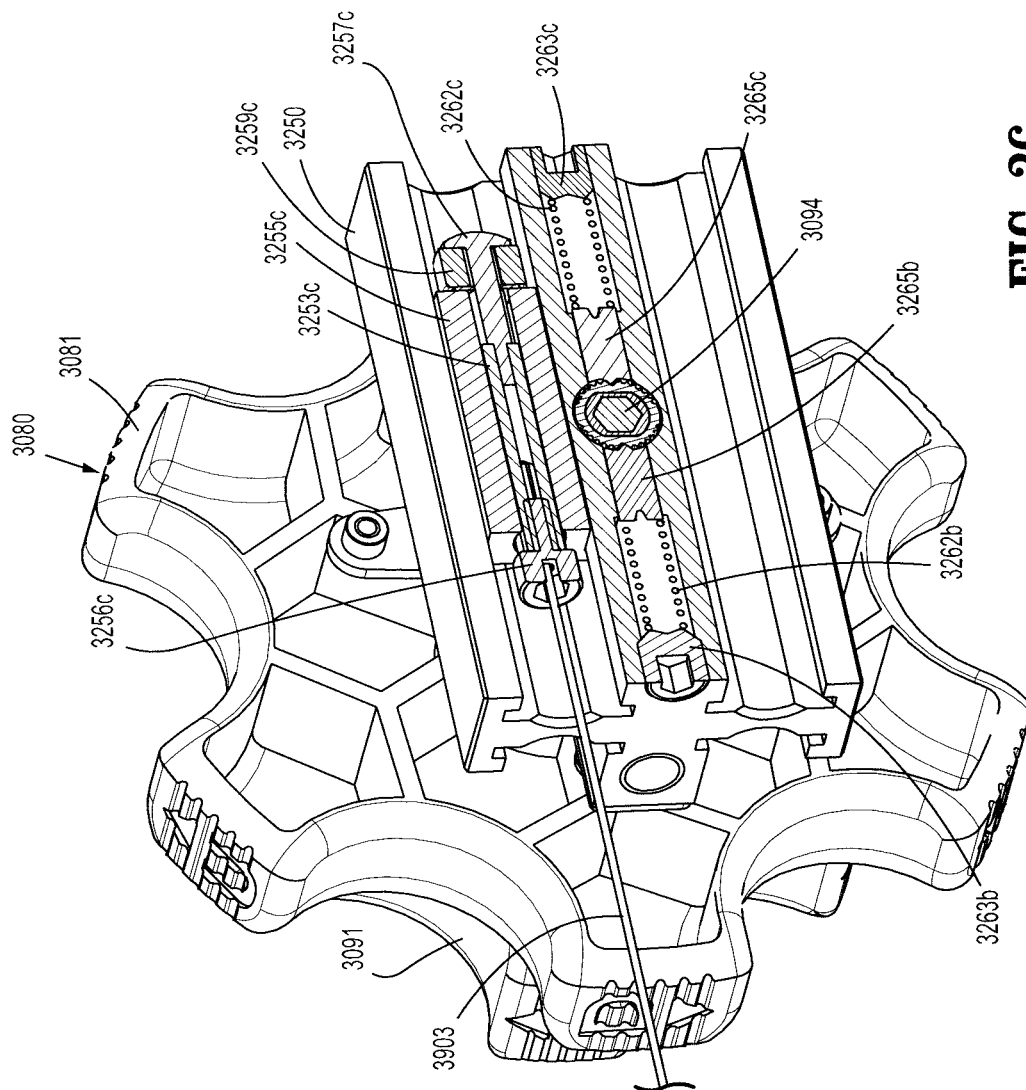


FIG. 36

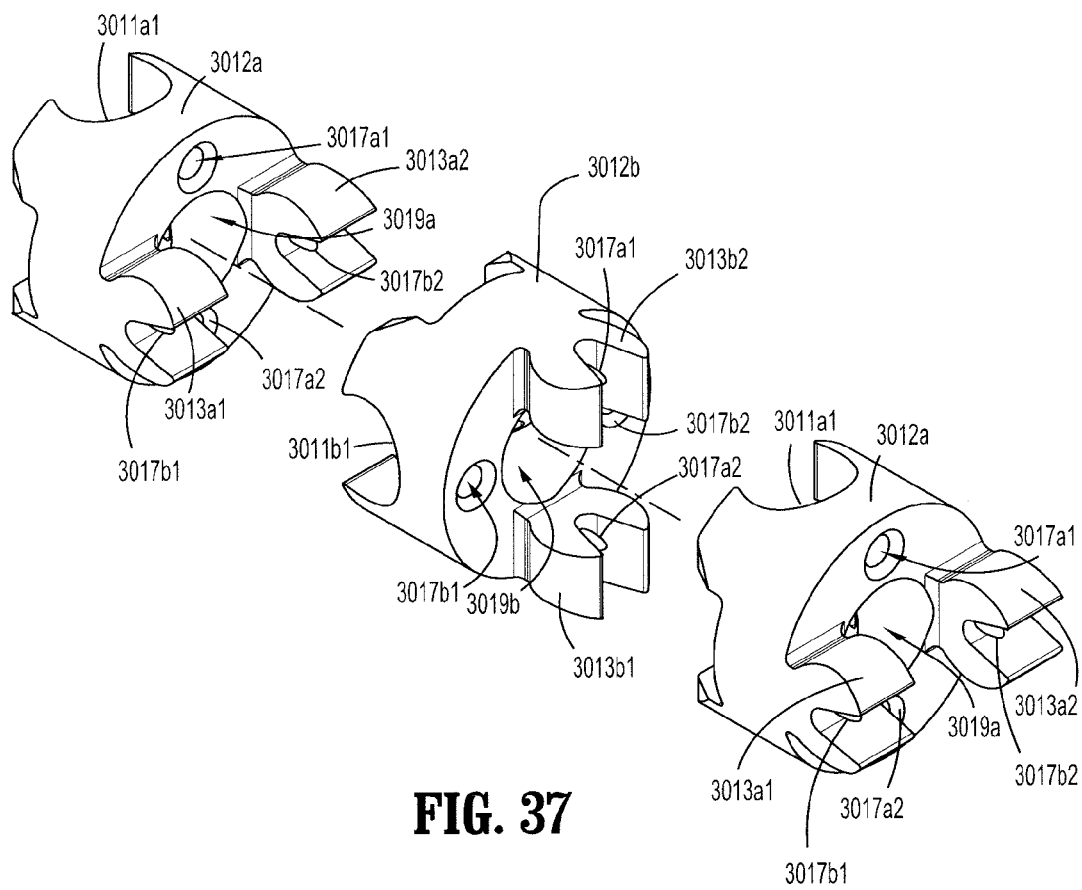


FIG. 37

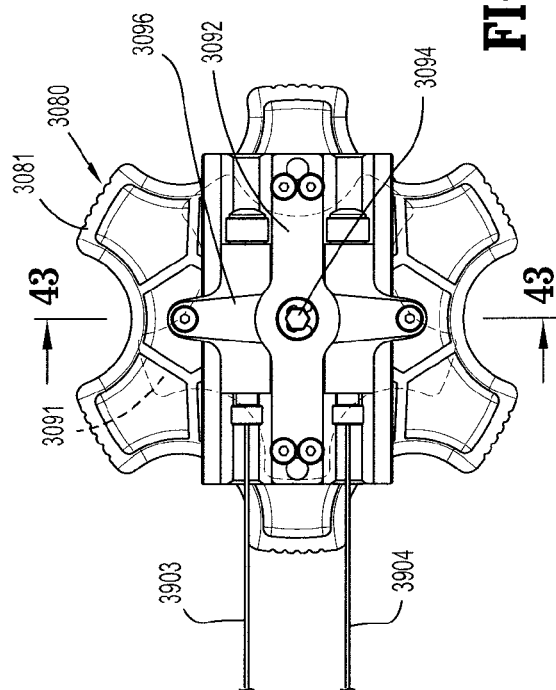


FIG. 38

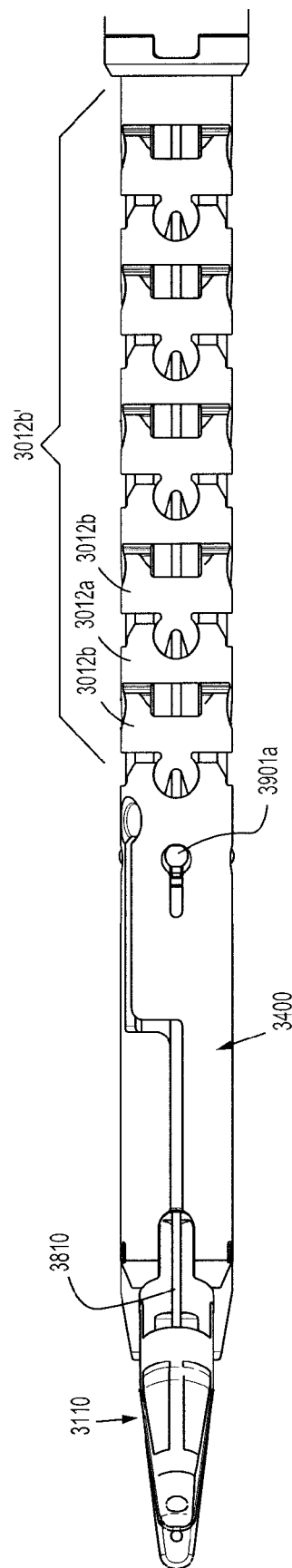


FIG. 39

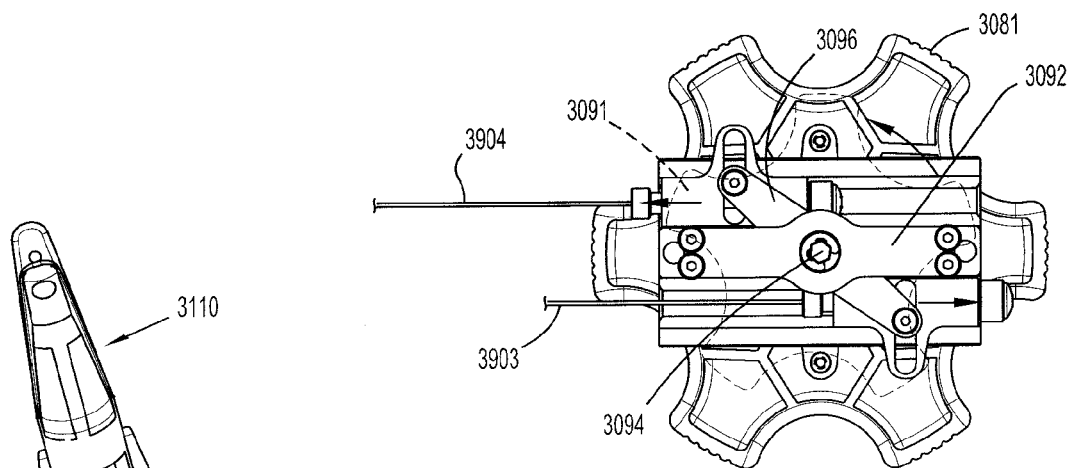


FIG. 40

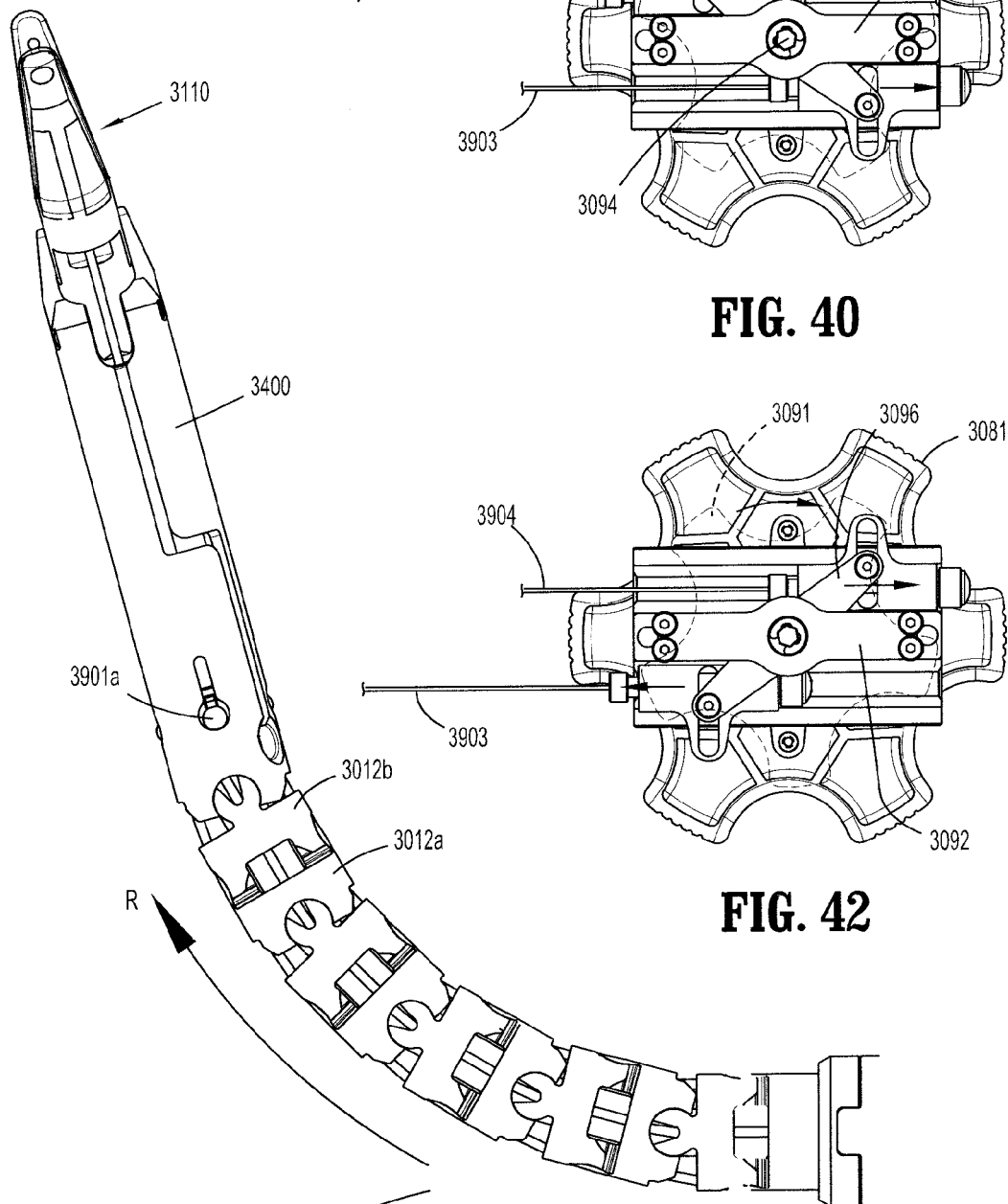


FIG. 41

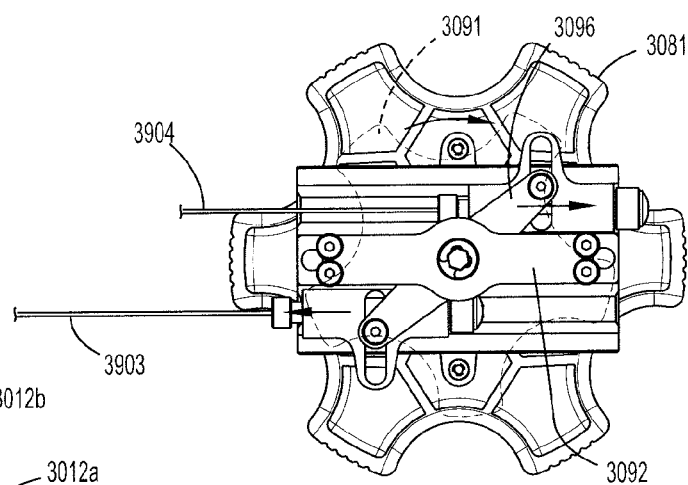


FIG. 42

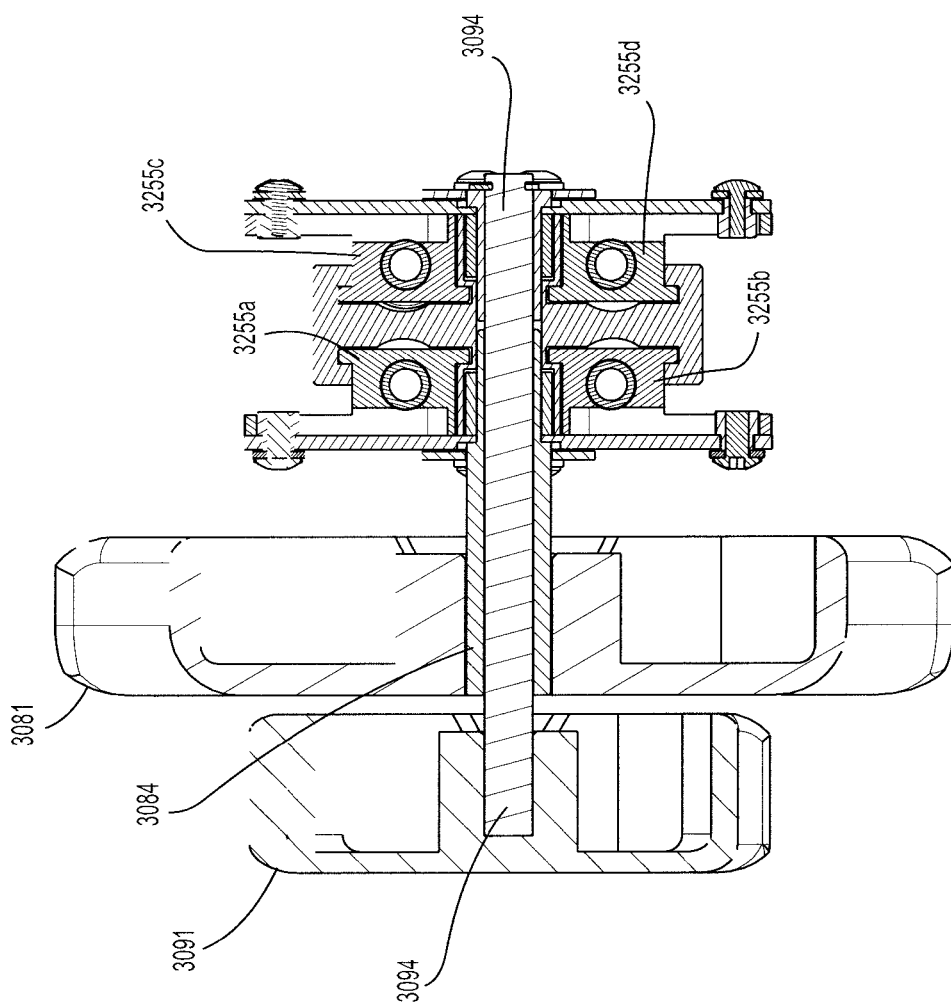


FIG. 43

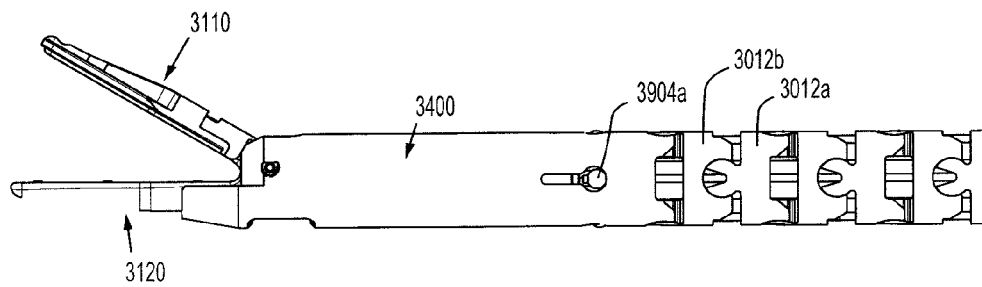


FIG. 44

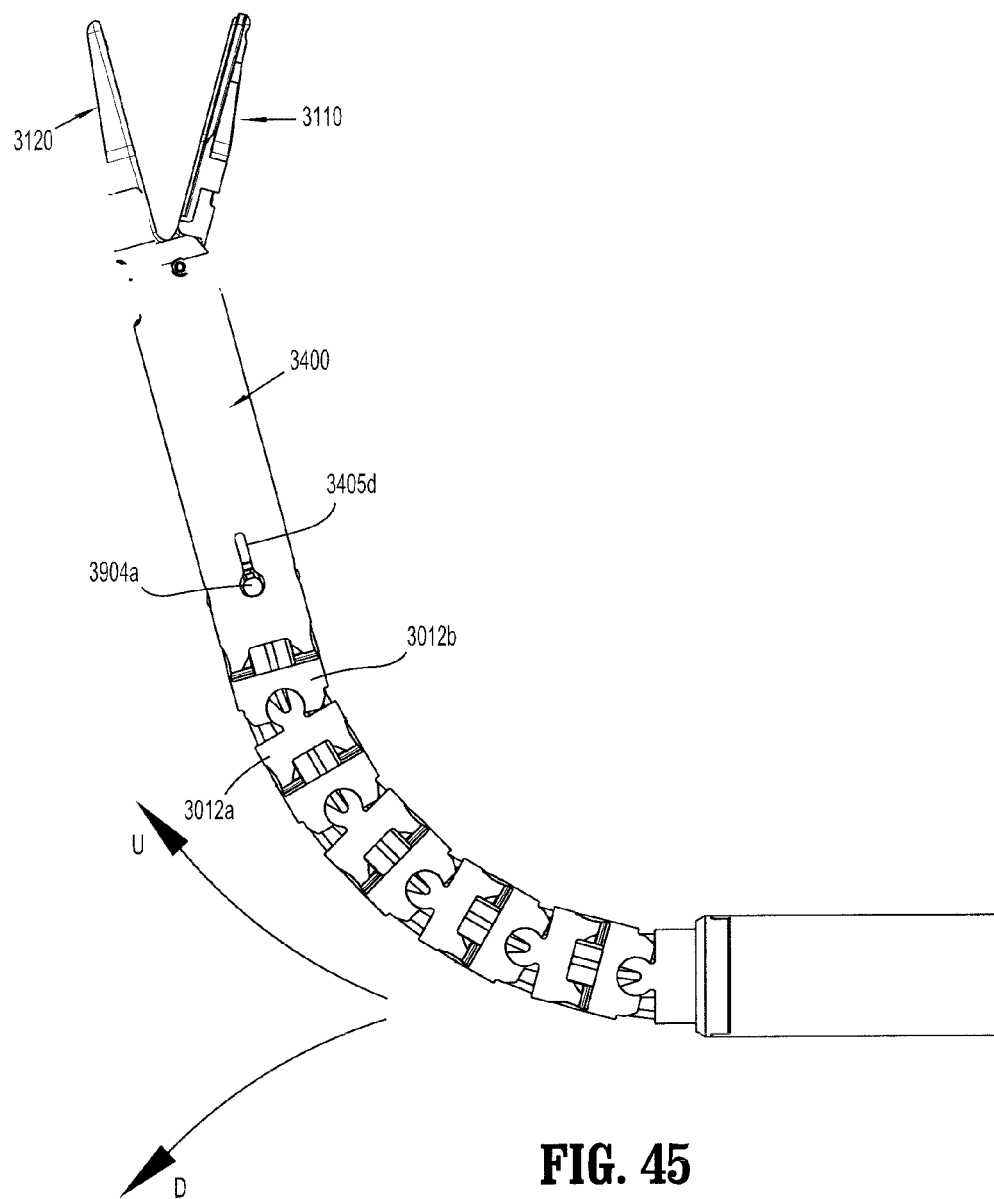


FIG. 45

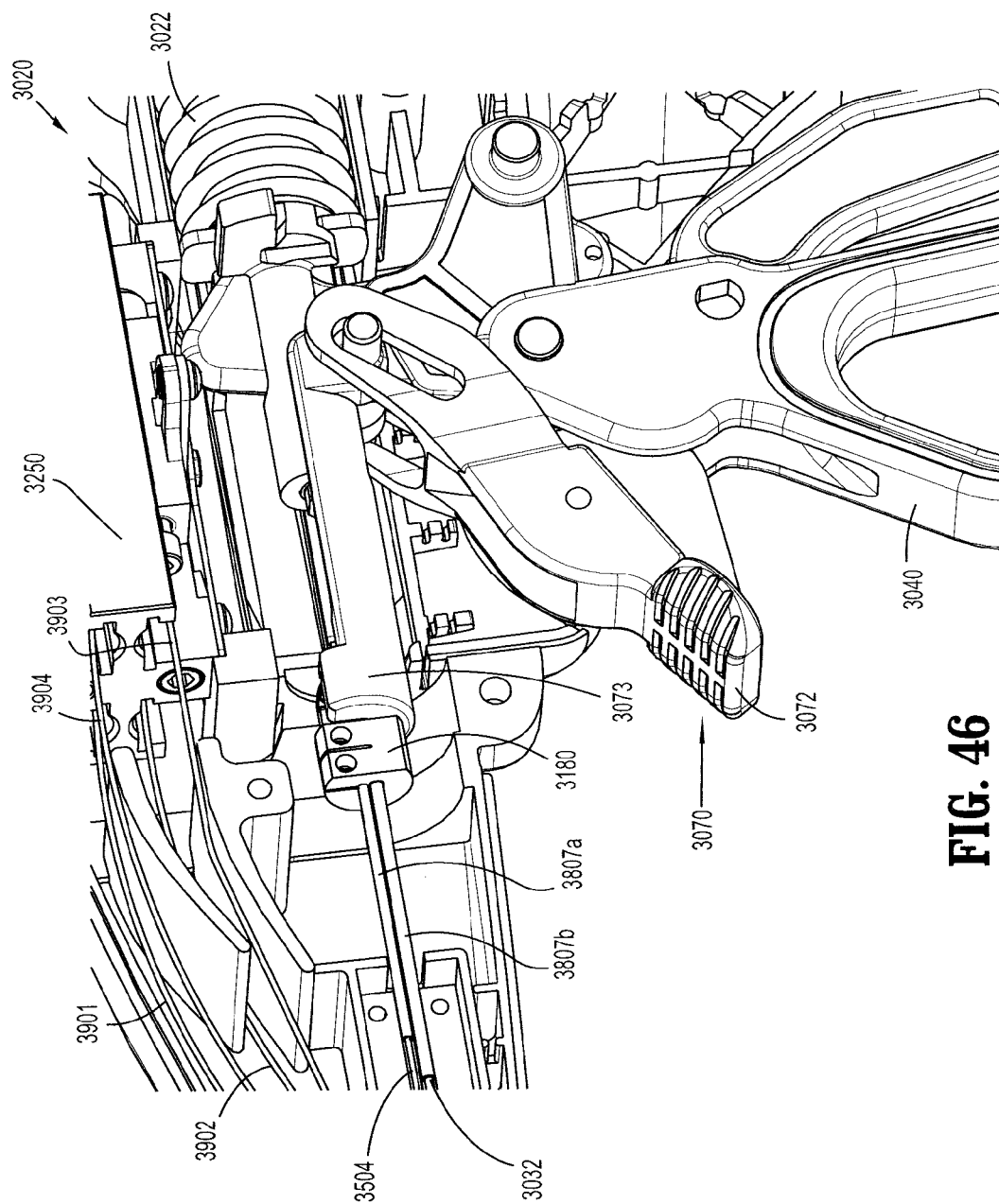


FIG. 46

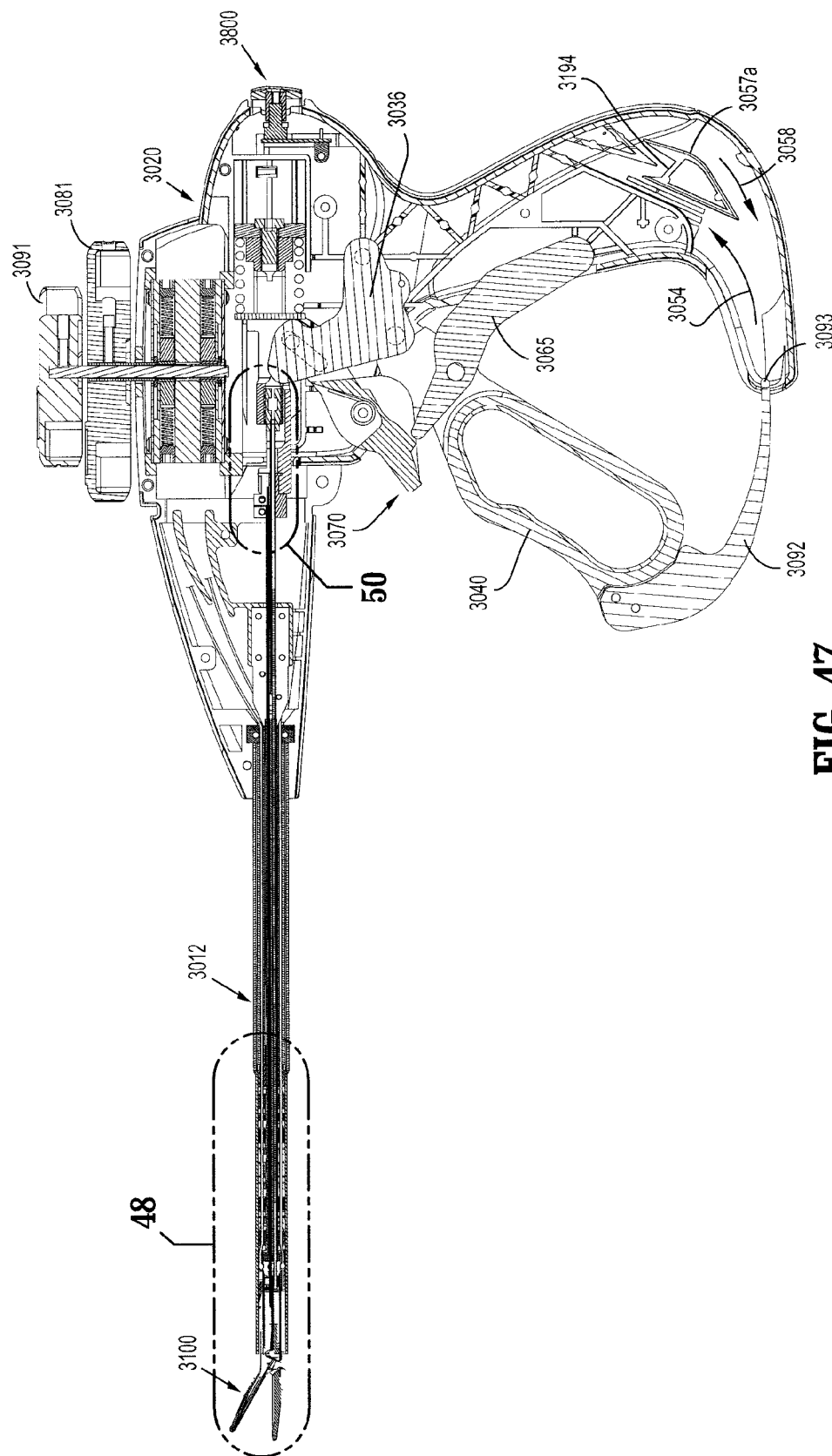


FIG. 47

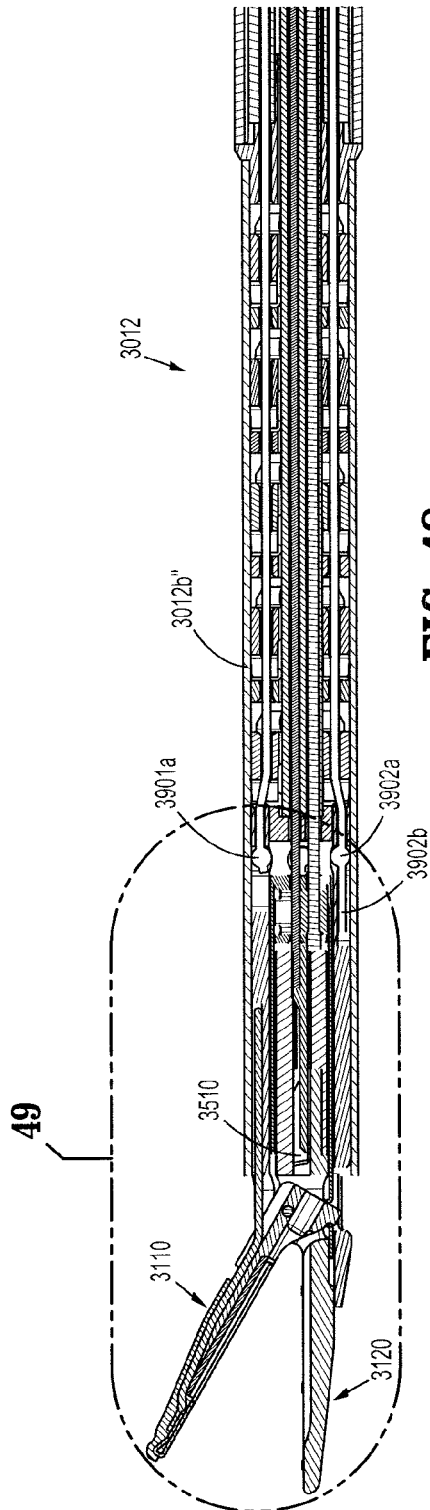


FIG. 48

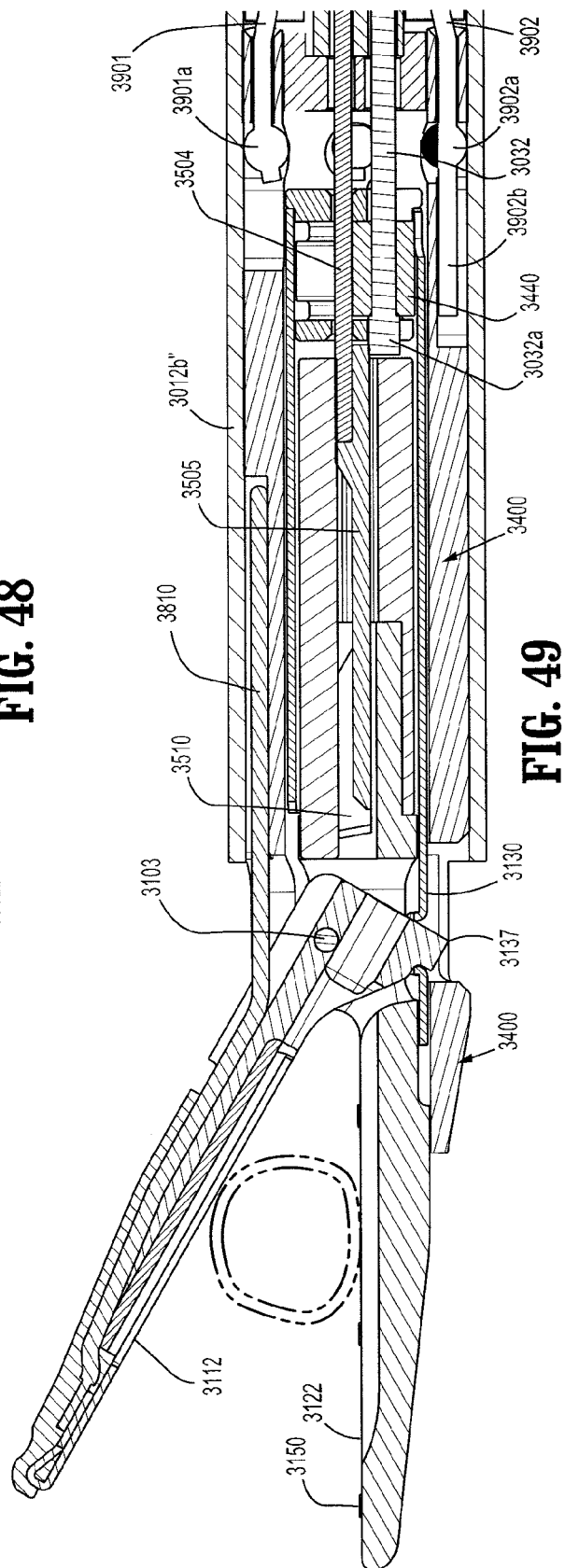


FIG. 49

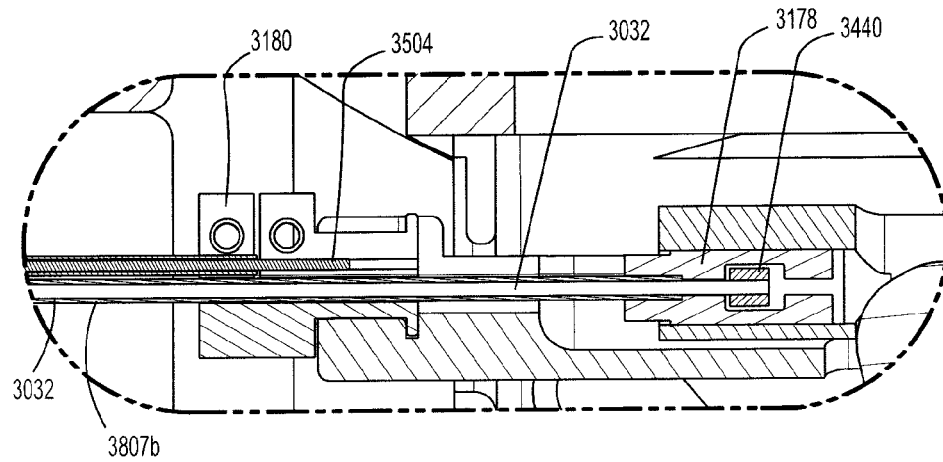


FIG. 50

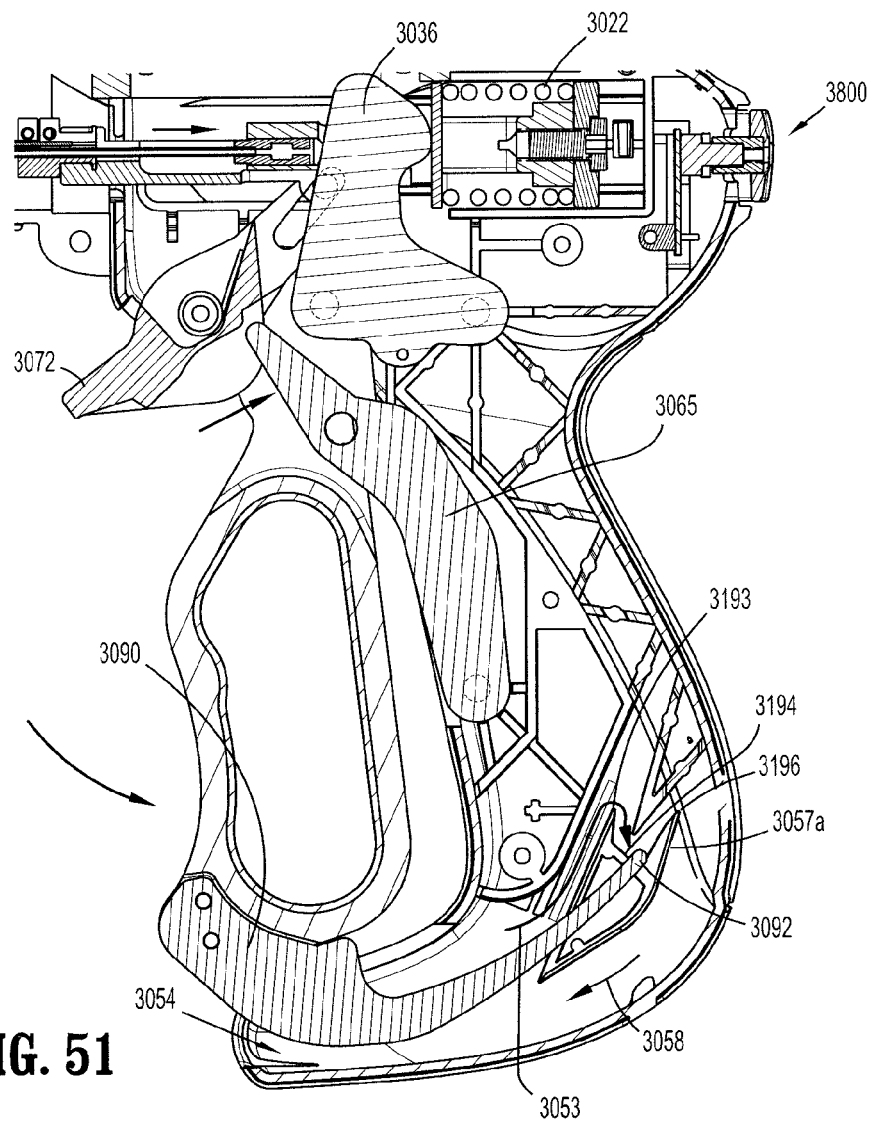


FIG. 51

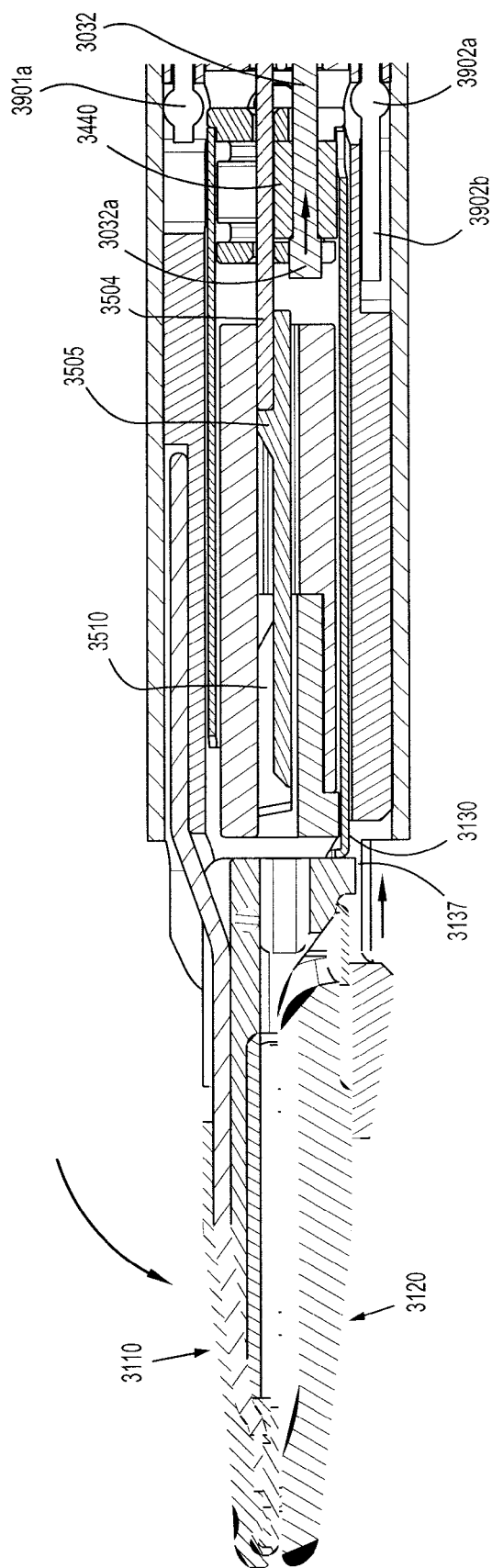


FIG. 52

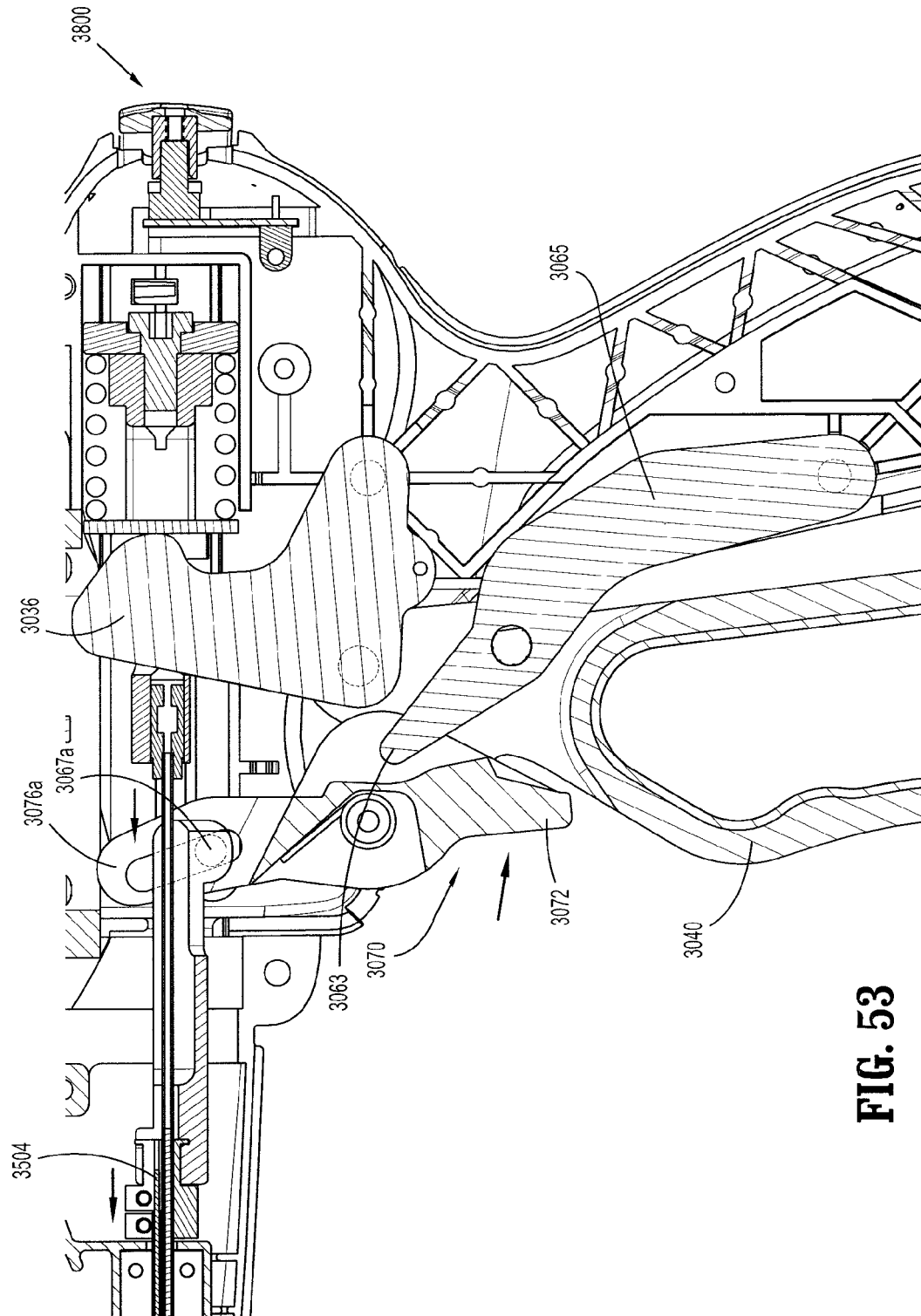


FIG. 53

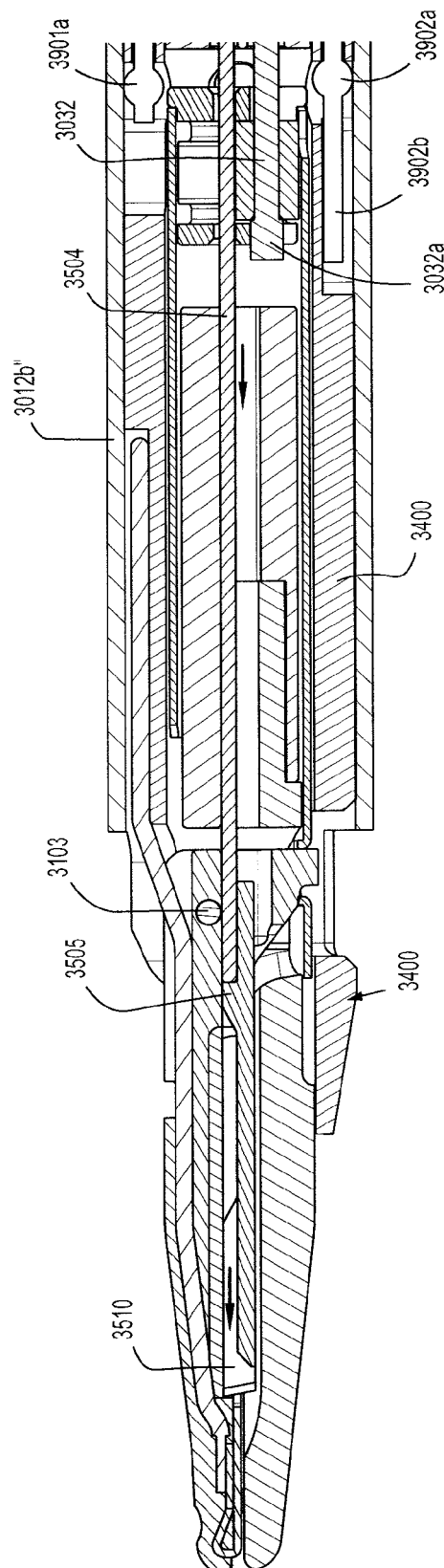


FIG. 54

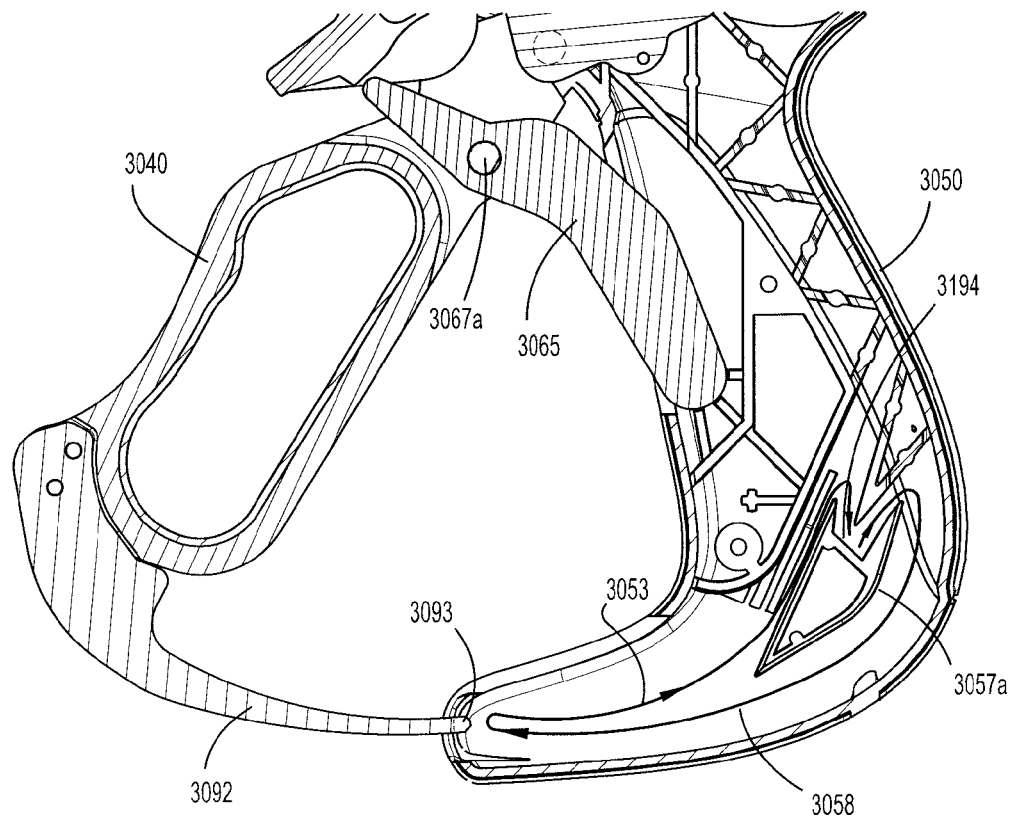


FIG. 55

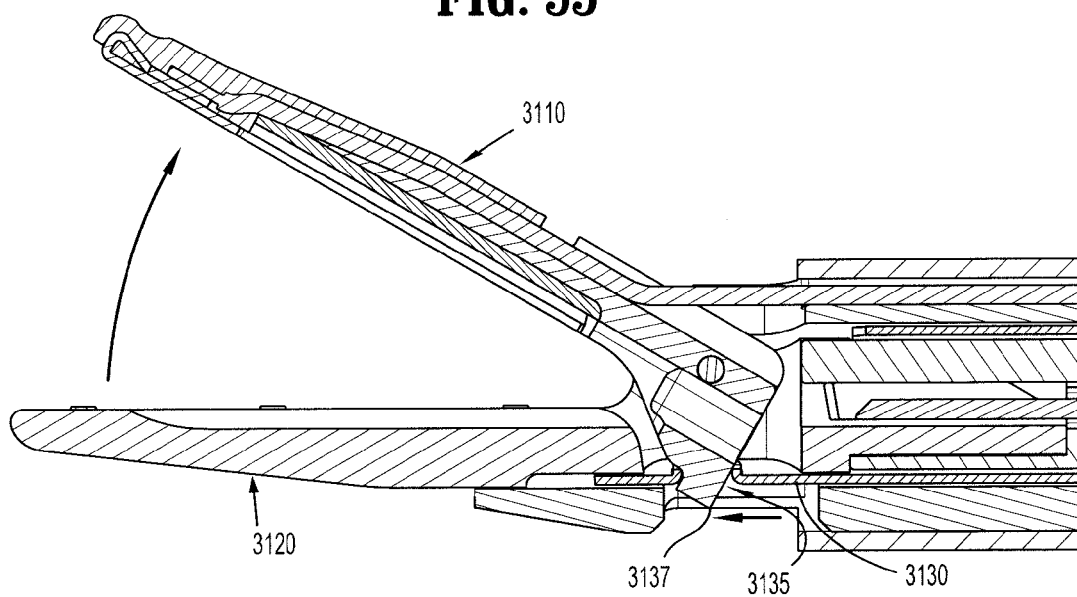


FIG. 56

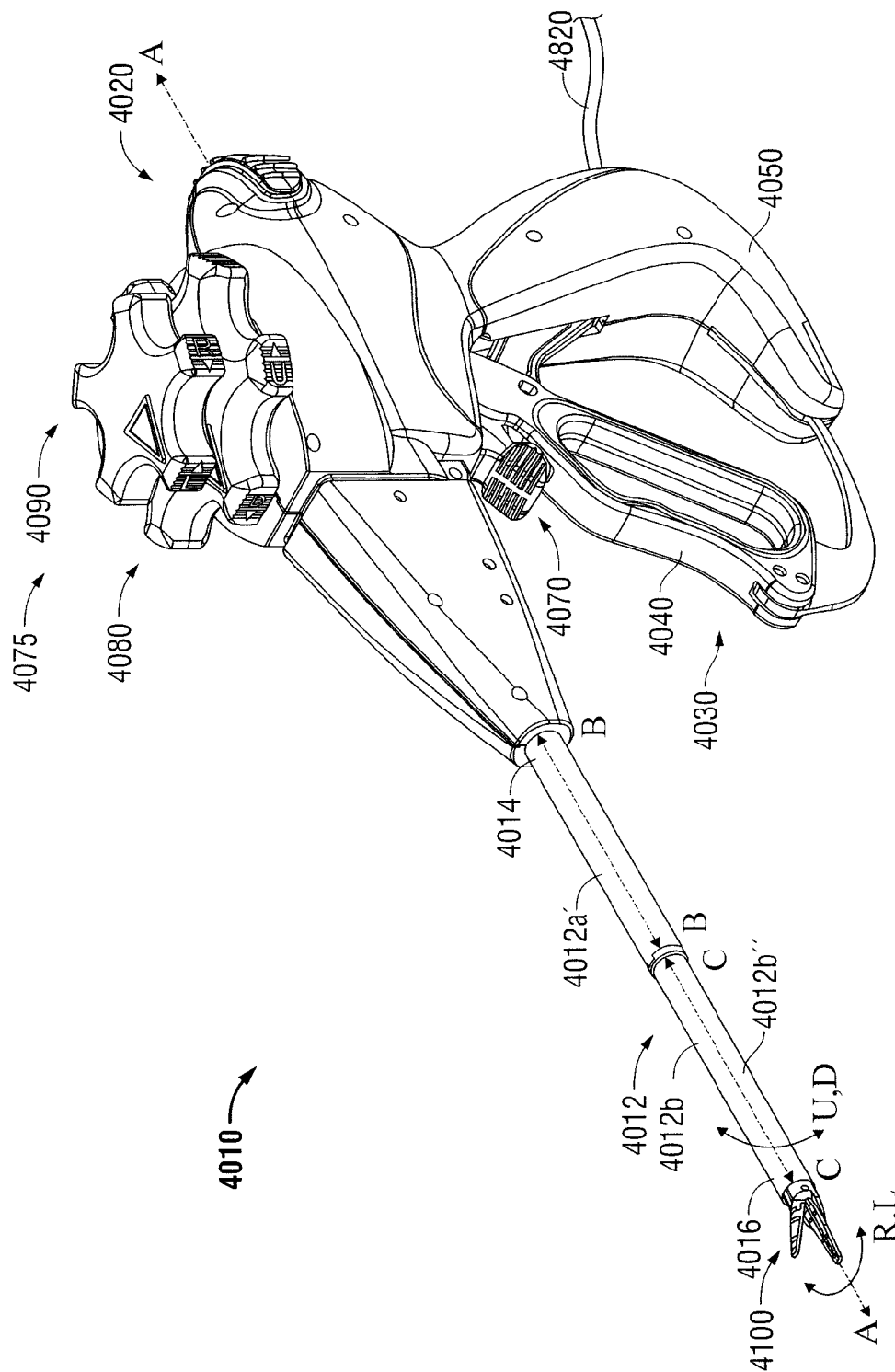
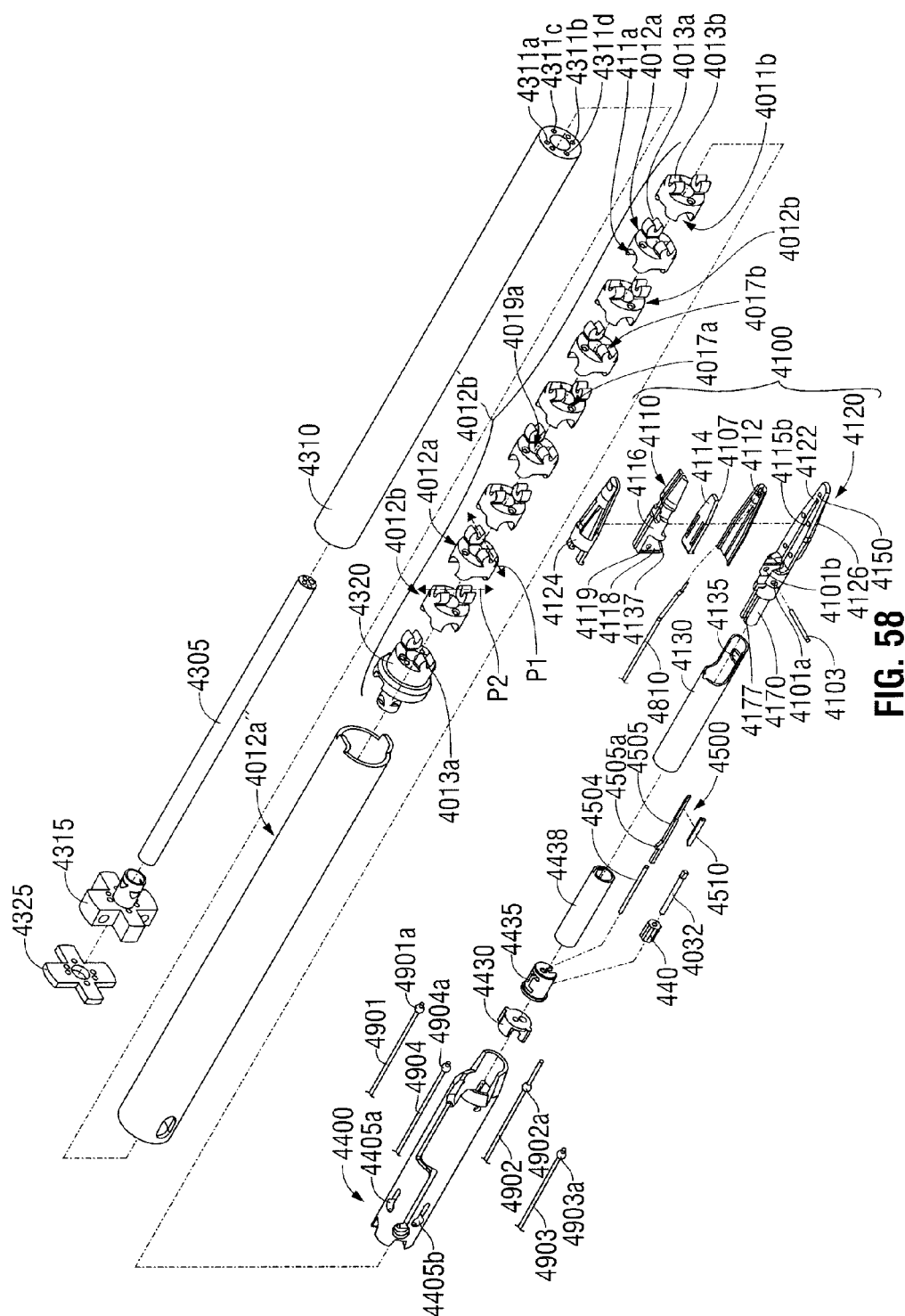


FIG. 57



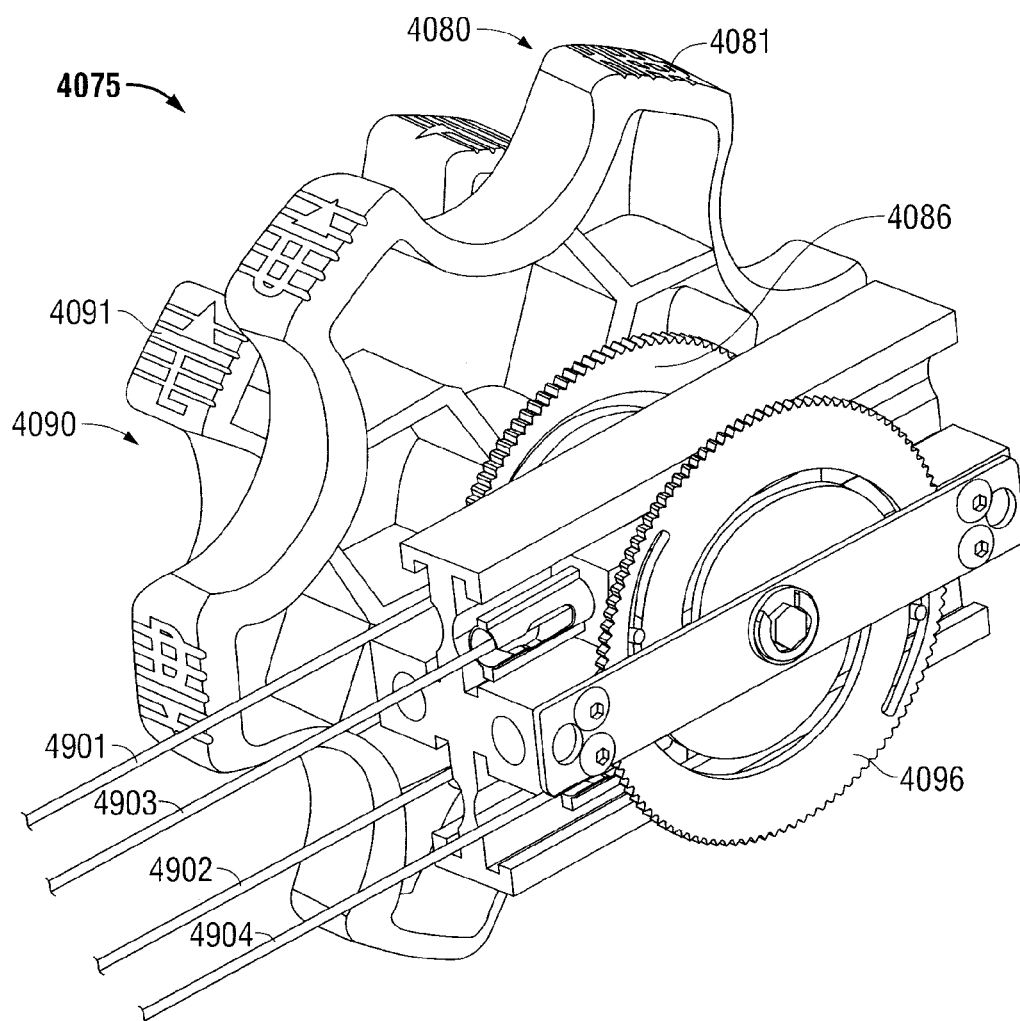


FIG. 59

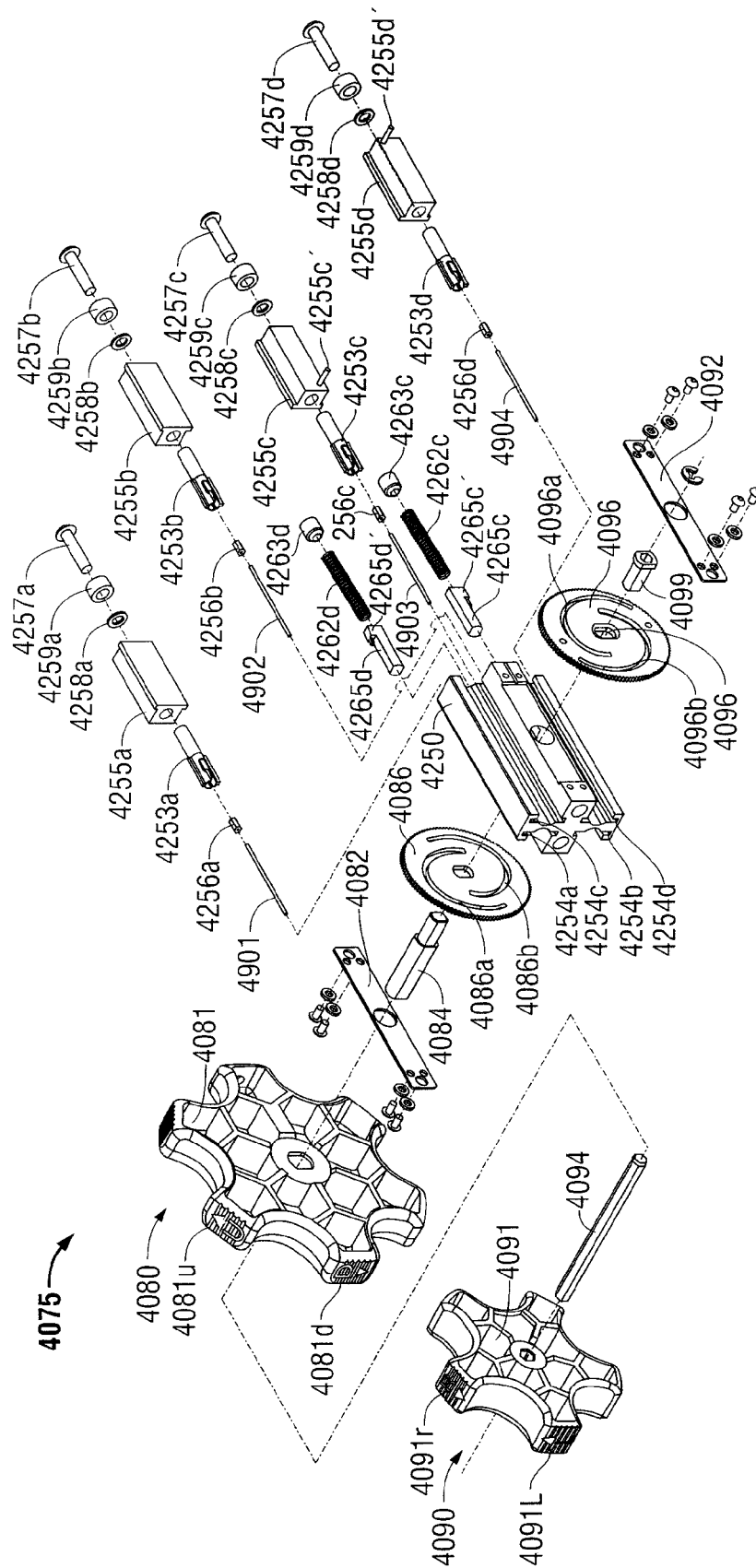


FIG. 60

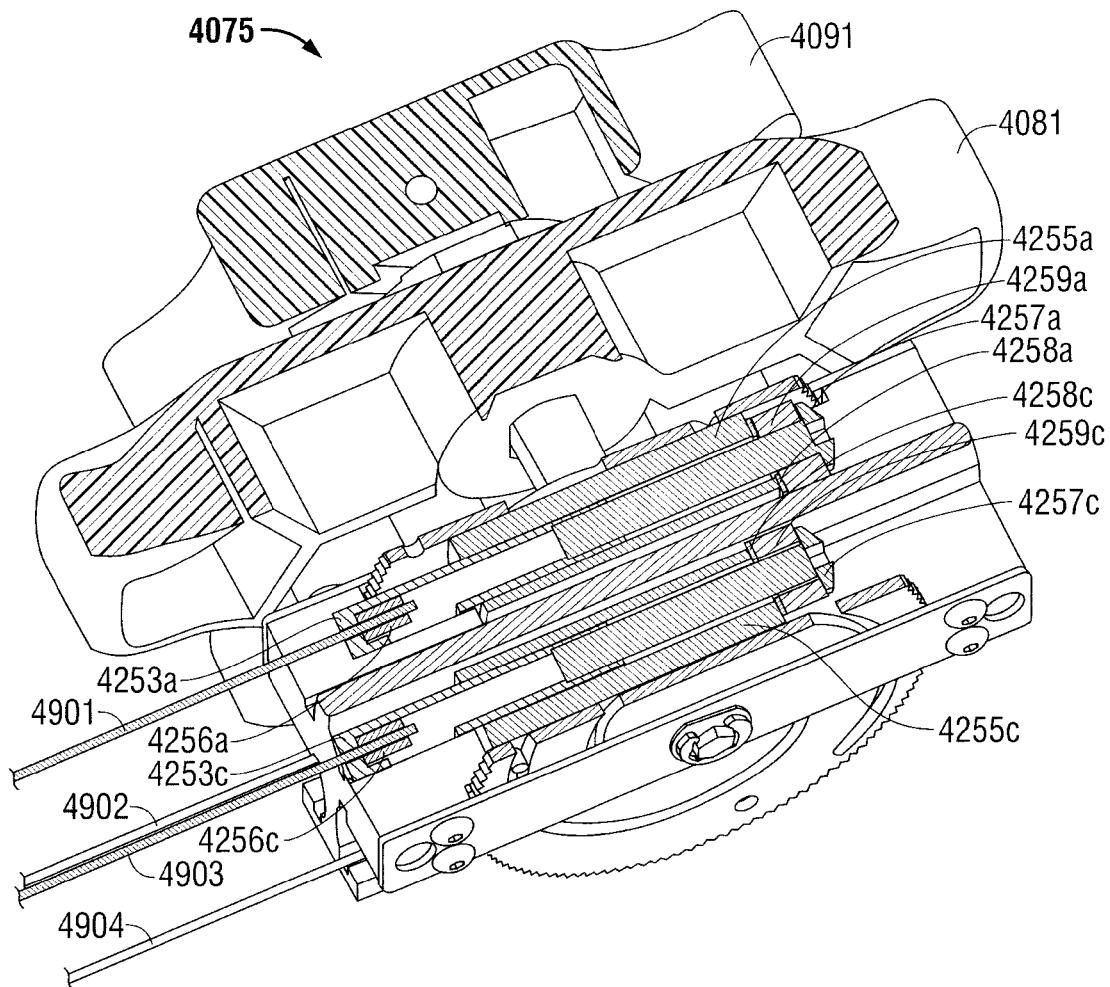


FIG. 61

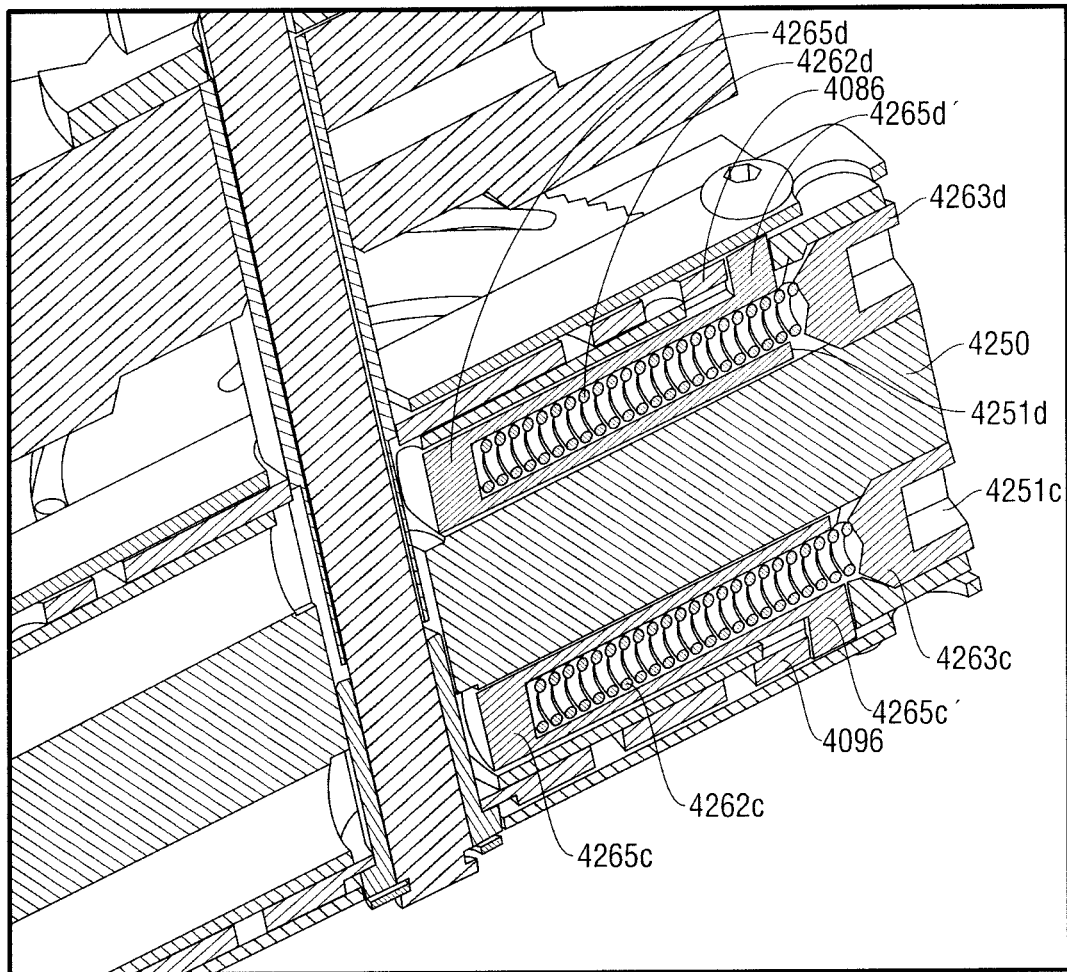


FIG. 62

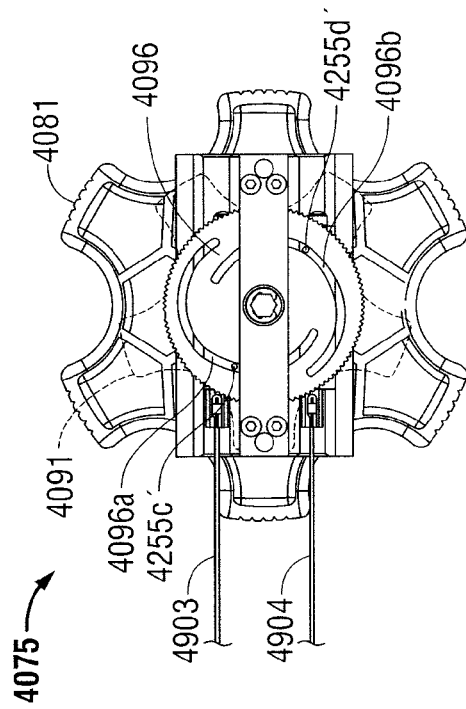


FIG. 63

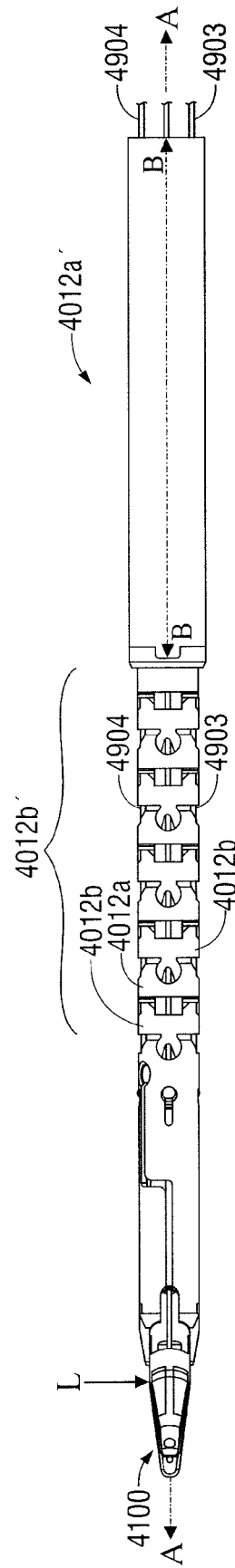


FIG. 64

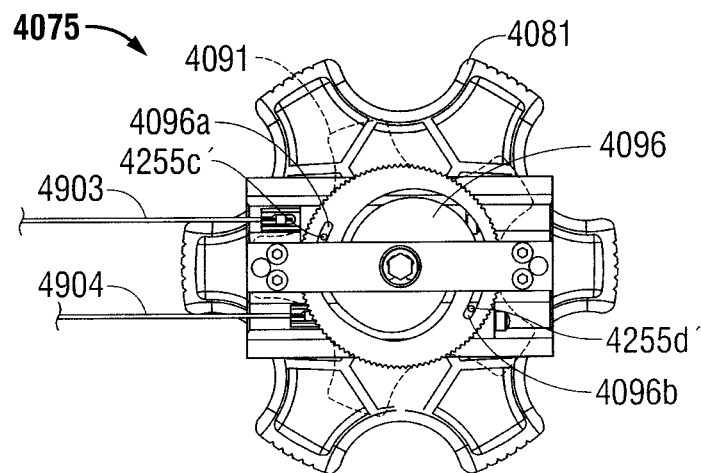


FIG. 65

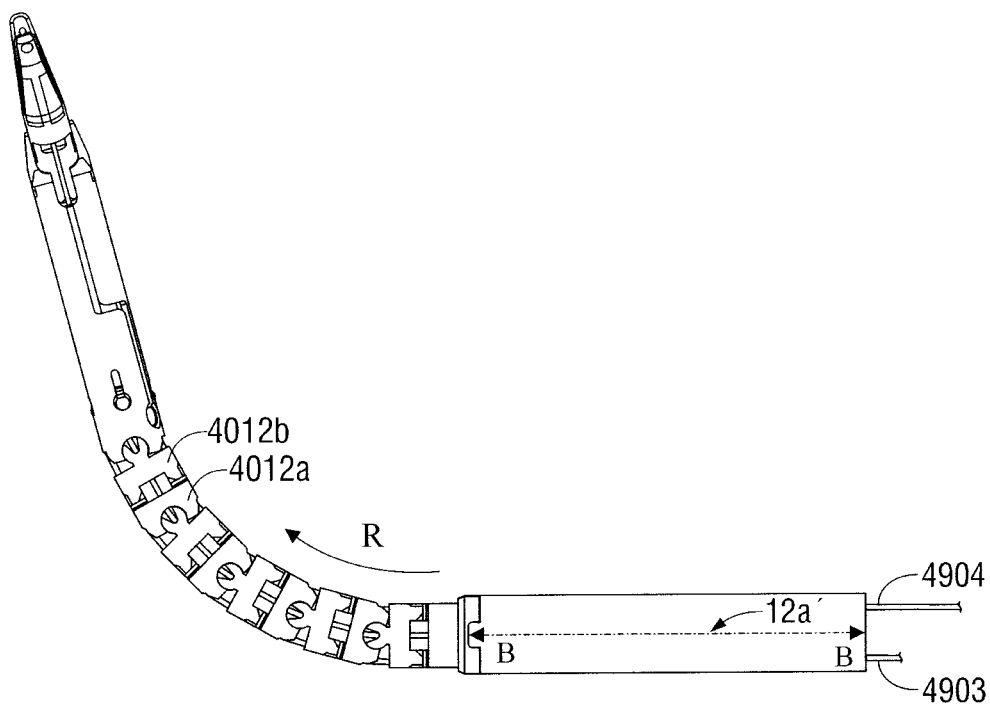


FIG. 66

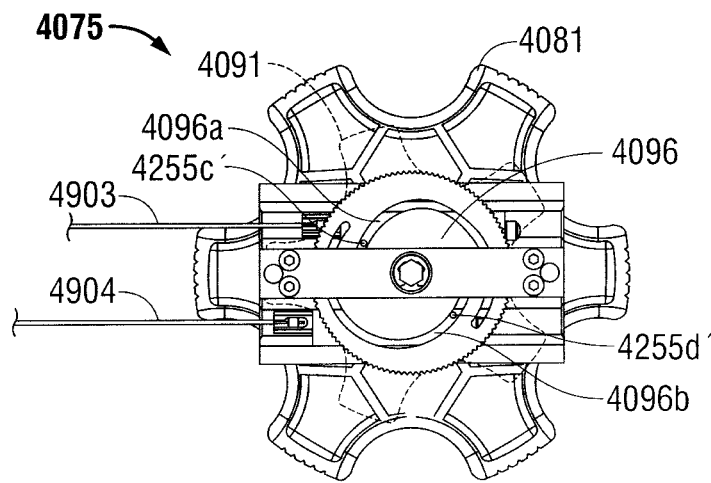


FIG. 67

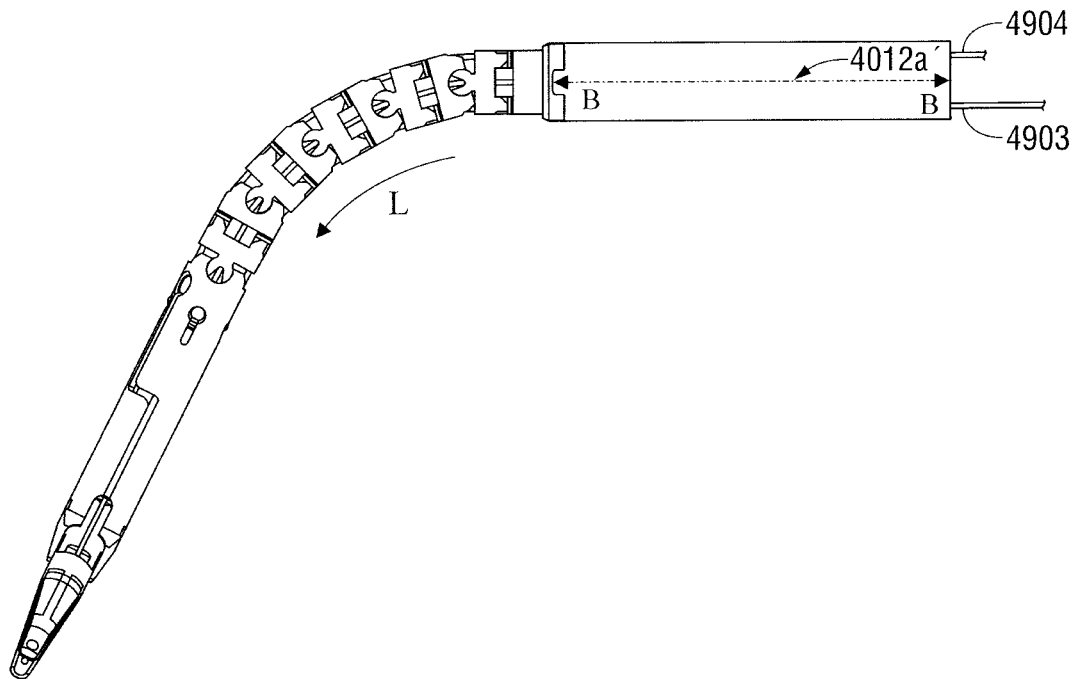


FIG. 68

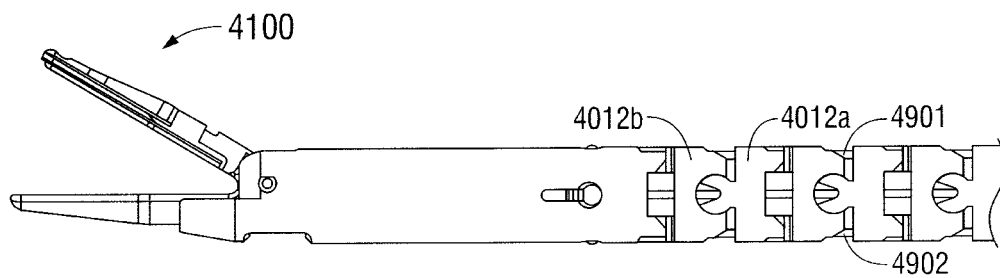


FIG. 69

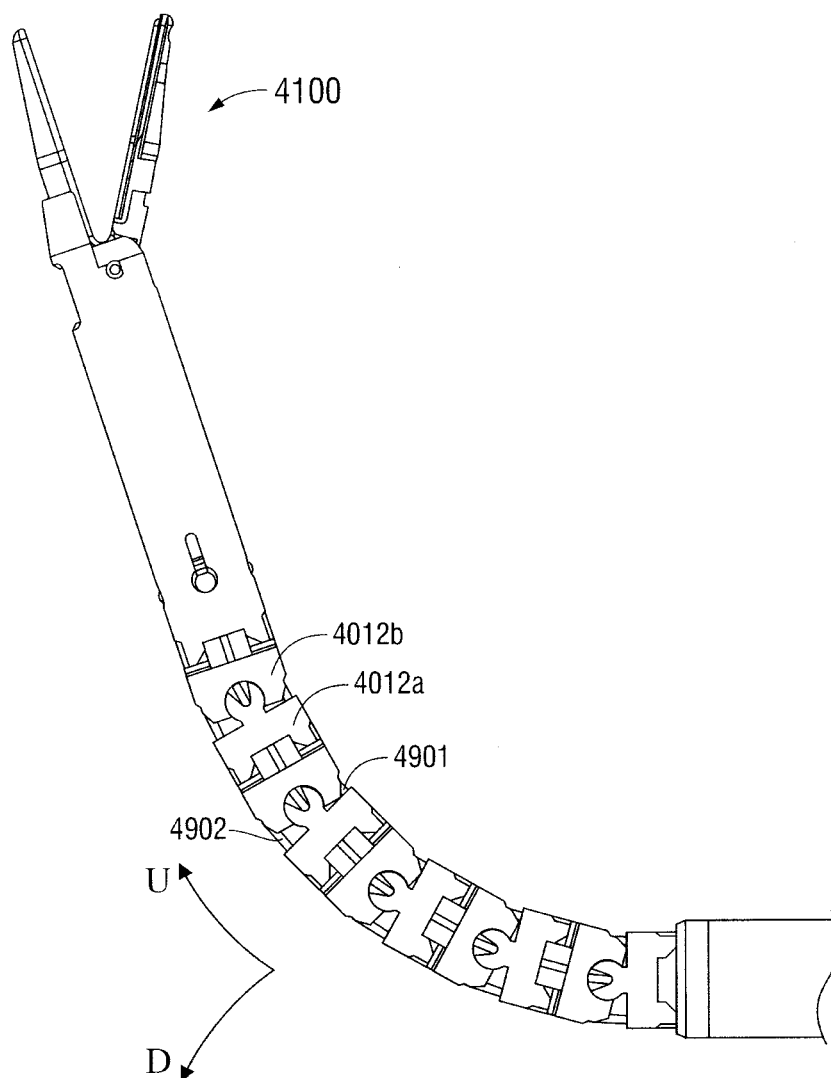


FIG. 70

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ENDOSCOPIC VESSEL SEALER AND DIVIDER HAVING A FLEXIBLE ARTICULATING SHAFT

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present application is a Continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 12/718,143 filed Mar. 5, 2010, now U.S. Pat. No. 8,478,143, which is a Continuation-in-part Application claiming the benefit of and priority to U.S. application Ser. No. 12/443,087 filed on Mar. 26, 2009, which is a National Phase Application filed under 35 U.S.C. §371 of International Application Serial No. PCT/US2007/021440, filed Oct. 5, 2007, which claims the benefit of and priority to U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/850,214 filed on Oct. 6, 2006. The present Application also claims the benefit of and priority to U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 61/157,722 filed on Mar. 5, 2009. The present Application also claims the benefit of and priority to U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 61/249,054 filed on Oct. 6, 2009. The entire content of each of these Applications is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND

The present disclosure relates to an electrosurgical forceps and more particularly, the present disclosure relates to an endoscopic electrosurgical forceps for sealing and/or cutting tissue utilizing an elongated, generally flexible and articulating shaft.

TECHNICAL FIELD

Electrosurgical forceps utilize both mechanical clamping action and electrical energy to effect hemostasis by heating the tissue and blood vessels to coagulate, cauterize and/or seal tissue. As an alternative to open forceps for use with open surgical procedures, many modern surgeons use endoscopes and endoscopic instruments for remotely accessing organs through smaller, puncture-like incisions. As a direct result thereof, patients tend to benefit from less scarring and reduced healing time.

Generally, endoscopic surgery involves incising through body walls for example, viewing and/or operating on the ovaries, uterus, gall bladder, bowels, kidneys, appendix, etc. There are many common endoscopic surgical procedures, including arthroscopy, laparoscopy (pelviscopy), gastroenteroscopy and laryngobronchoscopy, just to name a few. Typically, trocars are utilized for creating the incisions through which the endoscopic surgery is performed.

Trocar tubes or cannula devices are extended into and left in place in the abdominal wall to provide access for endoscopic surgical tools. A camera or endoscope is inserted through a relatively large diameter trocar tube which is generally located at the naval incision, and permits the visual inspection and magnification of the body cavity. The surgeon can then perform diagnostic and therapeutic procedures at the surgical site with the aid of specialized instrumentation, such as, forceps, cutters, applicators, and the like which are designed to fit through additional cannulas. Thus, instead of a large incision (typically 12 inches or larger) that cuts through major muscles, patients undergoing endoscopic surgery receive more cosmetically appealing incisions, between 5 and 10 millimeters in size. Recovery is, therefore, much quicker and patients require less anesthesia than traditional surgery.

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In addition, because the surgical field is greatly magnified, surgeons are better able to dissect blood vessels and control blood loss.

In continuing efforts to reduce the trauma of surgery, interest has recently developed in the possibilities of performing procedures to diagnose and surgically treat a medical condition without any incision in the abdominal wall by using a natural orifice (e.g., the mouth or anus) to access the target tissue. Such procedures are sometimes referred to as endoluminal procedures, transluminal procedures, or natural orifice transluminal endoscopic surgery ("NOTES"). Although many such endoluminal procedures are still being developed, they generally utilize a flexible endoscope instrument or flexible catheter to provide access to the tissue target tissue. Endoluminal procedures have been used to treat conditions within the lumen including for example, treatment of gastroesophageal reflux disease in the esophagus and removal of polyps from the colon. In some instances, physicians have gone beyond the luminal confines of the gastrointestinal tract to perform intra-abdominal procedures. For example, using flexible endoscopic instrumentation, the wall of the stomach can be punctured and an endoscope advanced into the peritoneal cavity to perform various procedures.

Using such endoluminal techniques, diagnostic exploration, liver biopsy, cholecystectomy, splenectomy, and tubal ligation have reportedly been performed in animal models. After the intra-abdominal intervention is completed, the endoscopic instrumentation is retracted into the stomach and the puncture closed. Other natural orifices, such as the anus or vagina, may also allow access to the peritoneal cavity.

As mentioned above, many endoscopic and endoluminal surgical procedures typically require cutting or ligating blood vessels or vascular tissue. However, this ultimately presents a design challenge to instrument manufacturers who must attempt to find ways to make endoscopic instruments that fit through the smaller cannulas. Due to the inherent spatial considerations of the surgical cavity, surgeons often have difficulty suturing vessels or performing other traditional methods of controlling bleeding, e.g., clamping and/or tying-off transected blood vessels. By utilizing an endoscopic electrosurgical forceps, a surgeon can either cauterize, coagulate/desiccate and/or simply reduce or slow bleeding simply by controlling the intensity, frequency and duration of the electrosurgical energy applied through the jaw members to the tissue. Most small blood vessels, i.e., in the range below two millimeters in diameter, can often be closed using standard electrosurgical instruments and techniques. However, if a larger vessel is ligated, it may be necessary for the surgeon to convert the endoscopic procedure into an open-surgical procedure and thereby abandon the benefits of endoscopic surgery. Alternatively, the surgeon can seal the larger vessel or tissue utilizing specialized vessel sealing instruments.

It is thought that the process of coagulating vessels is fundamentally different than electrosurgical vessel sealing. For the purposes herein, "coagulation" is defined as a process of desiccating tissue wherein the tissue cells are ruptured and dried. "Vessel sealing" or "tissue sealing" is defined as the process of liquefying the collagen in the tissue so that it reforms into a fused mass. Coagulation of small vessels is sufficient to permanently close them, while larger vessels need to be sealed to assure permanent closure. Moreover, coagulation of large tissue or vessels results in a notoriously weak proximal thrombus having a low burst strength whereas tissue seals have a relatively high burst strength and may be effectively severed along the tissue sealing plane.

More particularly, in order to effectively seal larger vessels (or tissue) two predominant mechanical parameters are accu-

rately controlled—the pressure applied to the vessel (tissue) and the gap distance between the electrodes—both of which are affected by the thickness of the sealed vessel. More particularly, accurate application of pressure is important to oppose the walls of the vessel; to reduce the tissue impedance to a low enough value that allows enough electrosurgical energy through the tissue; to overcome the forces of expansion during tissue heating; and to contribute to the end tissue thickness which is an indication of a good seal. It has been determined that a typical fused vessel wall is optimum between 0.001 and 0.006 inches. Below this range, the seal may shred or tear and above this range the lumens may not be properly or effectively sealed.

With respect to smaller vessels, the pressure applied to the tissue tends to become less relevant whereas the gap distance between the electrically conductive surfaces becomes more significant for effective sealing. In other words, the chances of the two electrically conductive surfaces touching during activation increases as vessels become smaller.

It has been found that the pressure range for assuring a consistent and effective seal is between about 3 kg/cm² to about 16 kg/cm² and, desirably, within a working range of 7 kg/cm² to 13 kg/cm². Manufacturing an instrument which is capable of providing a closure pressure within this working range has been shown to be effective for sealing arteries, tissues and other vascular bundles.

Various force-actuating assemblies have been developed in the past for providing the appropriate closure forces to effect vessel sealing. For example, commonly-owned U.S. patent application Ser. Nos. 10/460,926 and 11/513,979 disclose two different envisioned actuating assemblies developed by Covidien—Energy-based Devices of Boulder, Colo., for use with Covidien's vessel sealing and dividing instruments commonly sold under the trademark LIGASURE®. The contents of both of these applications are hereby incorporated by reference herein.

During use, one noted challenge for surgeons has been the inability to manipulate the end effector assembly of the vessel sealer to grasp tissue in multiple planes, i.e., off-axis, while generating the above-noted required forces to effect a reliable vessel seal. It would therefore be desirable to develop an endoscopic or endoluminal vessel sealing instrument which includes an end effector assembly capable of being manipulated along multiple axes to enable the surgeon to grasp and seal vessels lying along different planes within a surgical cavity.

Endoluminal procedures often require accessing tissue deep in tortuous anatomy of a natural lumen using a flexible catheter or endoscope. Conventional vessel sealing devices may not be appropriate for use in some endoluminal procedures because of a rigid shaft that can not easily negotiate the tortuous anatomy of a natural lumen. It would therefore be desirable to develop an endoscopic or endoluminal vessel sealing instrument having a flexible shaft capable of insertion in a flexible endoscope or catheter.

SUMMARY

The present disclosure relates to an electrosurgical instrument for treating tissue which includes a housing having a flexible shaft extending therefrom with an axis A-A defined therethrough. The shaft includes first and second jaw members attached at a distal end thereof each including an electrically conductive tissue contacting surface adapted to connect to a source of electrosurgical energy. Upon electrical activation, the electrically conductive tissue contacting surfaces conduct electrosurgical energy through tissue held

between the jaw members. A drive assembly is encased in the housing and includes a first actuator operably coupled to a drive rod for reciprocation thereof and a second actuator operably coupled to the drive rod for rotation thereof. A knife is included and operably coupled to a distal end of the drive rod. Actuation of the first actuator moves the jaw members from a first position in spaced relation to one another to a second position closer to one another for engaging tissue. Actuation of the second actuator rotates the drive rod about the axis A-A to translate the knife to cut tissue disposed between the jaw members.

According to another embodiment of the present disclosure, an endoscopic forceps includes a housing with a shaft affixed to a distal end thereof. The shaft includes a flexible portion having an end effector assembly at a distal end thereof that supports a pair of jaw members adapted to connect to a source of electrosurgical energy. One or both of the jaw members are moveable relative to the other from a first, spaced apart position to a second position wherein the jaw members are closer to one another for manipulating tissue. A drive assembly including an actuating handle is disposed within the housing and is configured to move the jaws for manipulating tissue.

An articulation assembly includes one or more steering cables operably coupled to the flexible portion of the shaft. The steering cables are configured to articulate the flexible portion of the shaft upon movement thereof. The articulation assembly includes one or more articulating wheels disposed atop the housing that operably couple to the one or more steering cables connected to the flexible portion of the shaft such that articulation of one or more of the articulation wheels moves the steering cable to articulate the flexible portion of the shaft relative the longitudinal axis.

In another embodiment, the articulation assembly includes a plurality of steering cables that are movable to articulate the flexible portion of the shaft in multiple planes relative to the longitudinal axis. In still another embodiment, the articulation assembly includes one or more sliders coupled to the steering cables. The sliders cooperate with the articulating wheels to move the steering cables longitudinally in response to rotational movement of the articulating wheels. A spindle may be included that operably connects to the slider(s) and to an indexing wheel that allows the articulating wheel to move in discreet increments thereby permitting discreet articulation of the flexible portion of the shaft.

In another embodiment, the spindle is operably coupled to a slider by a cam member configured to rotate along with the spindle. The cam member includes an eccentric arcuate surface thereon having a center dissimilar from a center of rotation of the cam member. The slider is operatively coupled to the eccentric arcuate surface such that rotation of the cam member induces longitudinal motion of the slider.

In one embodiment, the articulation assembly includes two articulating wheels that are configured to move the flexible portion of the shaft; a first articulating wheel configured to move the flexible portion of the shaft substantially along a first plane and a second articulating wheel configured to move the flexible portion of the shaft substantially along a second plane. Movement of the two articulating wheels sequentially or simultaneously induces a corresponding sequential or simultaneous motion of the flexible portion of the shaft in the first and second planes. The first articulation wheel is selectively movable independent of the second articulation wheel and vice versa.

In one embodiment, the flexible portion of the shaft includes a plurality of joints that are nestingly arranged to facilitate articulation of the flexible portion of the shaft rela-

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tive to the longitudinal axis. Each joint of the plurality of joints may include one or a pair of distal knuckles and one or a pair of proximal clevises that nestingly engage one another to form the flexible portion of the shaft. Each pair of opposing distal knuckles and pair of opposing proximal clevises may be configured in an offset manner (offset ninety degrees (90°)) relative to one another. Each adjacent joint of the plurality of flexible joints may be offset ninety degrees (90°) relative to one another to facilitate movement of the joints. In yet another embodiment, one or more of the steering cables may be adapted to provide a return path to the electrosurgical energy source.

The drive assembly of the endoscopic forceps may include a drive rod extending at least partially through the flexible portion of the shaft. The drive rod may be operably coupled to the movable jaw member such that longitudinal reciprocation of the drive rod induces movement of the movable jaw member between the first and second positions. The drive assembly may also include a four bar mechanical linkage operably coupled to the drive rod to induce reciprocation of the drive rod. The four bar mechanical linkage may be operable from the housing. The drive rod may be substantially flexible.

According to another embodiment, an endoscopic surgical instrument for sealing tissue is provided. The instrument includes an end effector having a pair of jaw members adapted to connect to a source of electrosurgical energy. At least one of the jaw members is movable relative to the other to move the end effector between an open configuration wherein the jaw members are substantially spaced for receiving tissue and a closed configuration wherein the jaw members are closer together for contacting the tissue. A handle is manually movable to selectively induce motion in the end effector between the open configuration and the closed configuration. An elongated shaft defines a longitudinal axis and includes distal and proximal ends. The distal end is coupled to the end effector and the proximal end is coupled to the handle. The elongated shaft includes an articulating portion that is movable between an aligned configuration and an articulated configuration with respect to the longitudinal axis. An articulation assembly is operable to move the articulating portion of the elongated shaft between the aligned configuration and articulated configuration. The articulation assembly includes an actuator positioned on the instrument for manipulation by an operator during a surgical procedure. A cam member is coupled to the actuator such that the actuator is operable to rotate the cam member about a center of rotation. The cam member includes an eccentric arcuate surface that has a center dissimilar from the center of rotation of the cam member. A pair of cables is coupled to the arcuate surface such that rotation of the cam member induces differential longitudinal motion in the cables. The cables are coupled to the distal end of the elongated shaft such that the differential longitudinal motion in the pair of cables moves the articulating portion of the elongated shaft between the aligned configuration and the articulated configuration in a first plane of articulation.

The articulation assembly may include a second actuator positioned on the instrument for manipulation by an operator during a surgical procedure. The second actuator may be operable to induce motion of the articulating portion of the elongated shaft between aligned and articulated configurations in a second plane of articulation. The second actuator may be operable to rotate a second cam member about a center of rotation, and the second cam member may be coupled to a second pair of cables being coupled to the distal end of the elongated shaft.

The first actuator may include a rotatable wheel and the first cam member may include a cam wheel coupled to the

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rotatable wheel such that a given angular displacement of the rotatable wheel induces an equivalent angular displacement of the cam wheel. The arcuate surface may define a cam slot in the cam wheel extending between a radially inward and a radially outward positions on the cam wheel. The cam slot may be tapered such that angular displacement of the cam wheel induces greater differential longitudinal motion in the first pair of cables when the cam wheel is closer to a home position where the articulating portion is in the aligned configuration than when the cam wheel is further from the home position.

The instrument may also include an indexing mechanism for maintaining the articulation assembly in a plurality of relatively stable configurations to facilitate orienting the end effector in one of a plurality of discrete orientations. The indexing mechanism may include an indexing slide for engaging a plurality of teeth disposed on an outer circumferential surface of the first cam member.

The articulating portion may include a plurality of links arranged sequentially such that each of the links may pivot relative to a neighboring link to move the articulating portion between the aligned and articulated configurations. A first pivoting axis defined by one of the links may be radially offset from a second pivoting axis defined by another of the plurality of links by about 90° such that a second plane of articulation is substantially orthogonal to the first plane of articulation.

According to another aspect of the disclosure, an endoscopic surgical instrument for sealing tissue includes an end effector having a pair of jaw members adapted to connect to a source of electrosurgical energy. One or both jaw members is movable relative to the other to move the end effector between an open configuration wherein the jaw members are substantially spaced for receiving tissue and a closed configuration wherein the jaw members are closer together for contacting tissue. A handle is manually movable to selectively induce motion in the end effector between the open configuration and the closed configuration. An elongated shaft defines a longitudinal axis and includes distal and proximal ends. The distal end is coupled to the end effector and the proximal end is coupled to the handle. The elongated shaft includes an articulating portion to permit the end effector to articulate with respect to the longitudinal axis. A pair of steering cables extending between the distal and proximal ends of the elongated shaft is coupled to the distal end of the elongated shaft such that differential longitudinal motion in the steering cables induces articulation of the end effector. An actuator is coupled to the pair of steering cables by a cam member. The actuator is movable through a range of motion to impart rotational motion to the cam member. The cam member is configured to impart longitudinal motion to the steering cables as a function of a distance the actuator is moved through the range of motion.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Various embodiments of the subject instrument are described herein with reference to the drawings wherein:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an endoscopic forceps showing a housing, a flexible shaft and an end effector assembly according to an embodiment the present disclosure;

FIG. 2 is an enlarged front, perspective view of the flexible shaft (without an outer casing) and the end effector assembly of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is an enlarged rear, perspective view of the flexible shaft and end effector assembly with parts separated;

FIG. 4 is a greatly-enlarged perspective view of a cam mechanism of the end effector assembly;

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FIG. 5 is a side cross section of the flexible shaft and end effector assembly of FIG. 2 shown in an open configuration;

FIG. 6 is a side cross section of the flexible shaft and end effector assembly of FIG. 2 shown in a closed configuration;

FIG. 7 is a side cross section of the flexible shaft and end effector of FIG. 2 showing distal translational movement of a cutting mechanism configured to cut tissue disposed within jaw members of the end effector assembly;

FIG. 8 is a longitudinal, cross-sectional view of the end effector assembly of FIG. 2 in an un-articulated condition;

FIG. 9 is a longitudinal, cross-sectional view of the end effector assembly of FIG. 2 in an articulated condition.

FIG. 10 is a cross-section of the housing showing the internal, electrical routing of an electrosurgical cable and electrical leads;

FIG. 11 is a greatly-enlarged view of the indicated area of detail of FIG. 10;

FIG. 12 is a perspective view of another embodiment of an endoscopic forceps showing a housing, a partially flexible shaft and an end effector assembly according to the present disclosure;

FIG. 13 is an enlarged perspective view of the partially flexible shaft of FIG. 12;

FIG. 14A is an enlarged, exploded perspective view of the partially flexible shaft of FIG. 13;

FIG. 14B is a greatly enlarged perspective view of a fine adjustment mechanism of according to the present disclosure;

FIG. 14C is an exploded perspective view of the housing of the forceps of FIG. 12;

FIG. 15A is a rear perspective of the housing showing various internal components disposed therein;

FIG. 15B is a front perspective of the housing showing various internal components disposed therein;

FIG. 16A is a side cross section of the partially flexible shaft of FIG. 13 with end effector assembly shown in open configuration;

FIG. 16B is a front perspective of the partially flexible shaft of FIG. 13 with end effector assembly shown in open configuration;

FIG. 16C is a bottom perspective of the partially flexible shaft of FIG. 13 with end effector assembly shown in partially open configuration;

FIG. 17A is a side cross section of the partially flexible shaft of FIG. 13 with end effector assembly shown in closed configuration;

FIG. 17B is a front, internal perspective of the partially flexible shaft of FIG. 13 with end effector assembly shown in closed configuration;

FIG. 18A is an enlarged internal perspective of an articulation assembly in accordance with the present disclosure;

FIG. 18B is a top cross section of the partially flexible shaft of FIG. 13 in an aligned, non-articulated orientation;

FIG. 18C is a top cross section of the partially flexible shaft of FIG. 13 in an articulated orientation;

FIG. 19A is a side cross section of the housing showing the forceps in a substantially closed orientation;

FIG. 19B is a side cross section of the housing showing the forceps in a substantially open orientation;

FIGS. 20A-20B are enlarged side perspective views of a gear member and articulation wheel of the articulation assembly;

FIG. 21 is a perspective view of an endoscopic forceps showing a housing, a flexible shaft, articulating assembly and an end effector assembly according to another embodiment of the present disclosure;

FIG. 22 is side view of the forceps of FIG. 21;

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FIG. 23 is an exploded, perspective view of the forceps of FIG. 21;

FIG. 24A is an enlarged, exploded perspective view of the articulating assembly of FIG. 21;

FIG. 24B is an enlarged perspective view of a slider of the articulating assembly;

FIG. 24C is an enlarged exploded perspective view of the slider of FIG. 24B;

FIG. 25 is an enlarged, exploded perspective view of the flexible shaft and end effector assembly of FIG. 21;

FIG. 26 is a greatly-enlarged, front perspective view of the end effector assembly of FIG. 21;

FIG. 27 is an enlarged bottom perspective view of an end effector support configured to support the end effector assembly and secure a plurality of steering cables that are actuated to articulate the forceps;

FIG. 28 is an enlarged, top perspective view of the end effector support showing a channel defined therein for guiding an electrical lead;

FIG. 29 is a greatly-enlarged, internal view of a guide plate configured to translationally support a drive rod and a knife rod for reciprocation therethrough;

FIG. 30 is an enlarged perspective view of the forceps shown in open configuration and showing a drive sleeve for actuating the jaw members and the plurality of steering cables;

FIG. 31 is an enlarged, front perspective view showing the various internal components of a knife assembly for cutting tissue disposed between the jaw members;

FIG. 32 is a greatly-enlarged, front perspective view of an outer tube configured to guide the steering cables therethrough and an internal tube or sleeve configured to guide the knife rod, drive rod and electrical lead therethrough;

FIG. 33 is a front perspective internal view showing the internal components of the drive assembly and articulating assembly;

FIG. 34 is a greatly-enlarged, internal perspective view showing a path defined in the housing for guiding the steering cables therethrough;

FIG. 35 is an enlarged, bottom perspective view of the articulation assembly of FIG. 21;

FIG. 36 is an enlarged, bottom perspective partial cross section of the articulation assembly of FIG. 15;

FIG. 37 is a greatly-enlarged, perspective view of a plurality of joints that are configured to nestingly engaged one another to form the flexible portion of the shaft;

FIG. 38 is an enlarged, bottom view of the articulating assembly showing the orientation of two steering cables of the plurality of steering cables in a "home" position;

FIG. 39 is an enlarged, top view of the flexible shaft in a non-articulated orientation;

FIG. 40 is an enlarged, bottom view of the articulating assembly showing the orientation of two steering cables of the plurality of steering cables when articulation the flexible shaft to the "RIGHT" (R);

FIG. 41 is an enlarged, top view of the flexible shaft in a "RIGHT" (R) articulated orientation;

FIG. 42 is an enlarged, bottom view of the articulating assembly showing the orientation of two steering cables of the plurality of steering cables when articulation the flexible shaft to the "LEFT" (L);

FIG. 43 is an enlarged, cross sectional view of the articulation assembly;

FIG. 44 is a side view of the end effector assembly in an open configuration;

FIG. 45 is an enlarged, side view of the flexible shaft in a "UP" (U) articulated orientation;

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FIG. 46 is a greatly-enlarged internal view of the housing of the forceps and the internal components thereof;

FIG. 47 is a side, cross section of the forceps of FIG. 1;

FIG. 48 is an enlarged view of the area of detail of FIG. 27;

FIG. 49 is an enlarged view of the area of detail of FIG. 28;

FIG. 50 is an enlarged view of the area of detail of FIG. 28;

FIG. 51 is an internal view of the housing showing the relative movement of the drive assembly and a locking mechanism when the forceps is actuated;

FIG. 52 is a greatly-enlarged cross section of the end effector assembly showing the relative movement of the drive rod and drive sleeve for actuating the jaw members;

FIG. 53 is an internal view of the housing showing the relative movement of the knife assembly and knife rod when actuated;

FIG. 54 is a greatly enlarged cross section of the end effector assembly showing the relative movement of the knife rod for cutting tissue disposed between the jaw members;

FIG. 55 is an internal view of the housing showing the relative movement of the locking mechanism when the actuating handle is released;

FIG. 56 is a greatly-enlarged, cross section of the end effector assembly showing the relative movement of the drive rod and drive sleeve for opening the jaw members;

FIG. 57 is a perspective view of an endoscopic forceps depicting a housing, an elongated shaft, articulation assembly and an end effector assembly according to another embodiment of the present disclosure;

FIG. 58 is an enlarged, exploded perspective view of the end effector and elongated shaft of FIG. 57 depicting a plurality of links forming an articulating portion of the elongated shaft, and a flexible tube forming a flexible portion of the elongated shaft;

FIG. 59 is an enlarged, perspective view of an underside of the articulation assembly of FIG. 57 depicting a cam wheel for driving a set of sliders;

FIG. 60 is an exploded, perspective view of the articulation assembly;

FIG. 61 is a cross-sectional view of the articulation assembly taken through the sliders of FIG. 59;

FIG. 62 is a cross-sectional perspective view of the articulation assembly depicting an indexing mechanism for maintaining the articulating portion of the elongated shaft in one of a number of discrete orientations;

FIG. 63 is a bottom view of the articulation assembly in a "home" configuration for maintaining the articulating portion of the elongated shaft in a non-articulated orientation;

FIG. 64 is an enlarged, top view of the elongated shaft wherein the articulating portion is in the non-articulated orientation corresponding to the "home" configuration of the articulation assembly and the flexible portion is in an aligned configuration;

FIG. 65 is a bottom view of the articulation assembly in a configuration corresponding to a RIGHT articulated orientation of the articulating portion;

FIG. 66 is a top view of the elongated shaft of FIG. 65, wherein the articulating portion is in the RIGHT articulated orientation;

FIG. 67 is a bottom view of the articulation assembly in a configuration corresponding to a LEFT articulated orientation of the articulating portion;

FIG. 68 is an enlarged, top view of the elongated shaft of FIG. 65, wherein the articulating portion is in the LEFT articulated orientation;

FIG. 69 is an enlarged, side view of a distal end of the elongated shaft, wherein the articulating portion is in the non-articulated orientation; and

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FIG. 70 is an enlarged, side view of the elongated shaft, wherein the articulating portion is in an UP articulated orientation.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The present disclosure relates to an electrosurgical forceps and more particularly, the present disclosure relates to an endoscopic electrosurgical forceps for sealing and/or cutting tissue utilizing an elongated, generally flexible and articulating shaft. In one embodiment, for example, such a device comprises a handle, handle assembly or other suitable actuating mechanism (e.g., robot, etc.) connected to a proximal end of a flexible, elongated body portion or shaft. A distal portion of the flexible shaft includes an articulating portion comprised of one or more joints to allow articulation of an end effector away from the longitudinal axis in response to actuation of articulation cables. An end effector is operatively supported on a distal end of the flexible shaft. The end effector includes a pair of jaws that can be actuated between a closed position and an open position. The jaws are adapted to supply electrical energy to tissue grasped between the jaws. The end effector also includes a knife assembly that can be actuated to cut tissue grasped within the jaws.

The functions of opening and closing the jaws; operating the knife assembly; and articulating the end effector can be performed remotely from the handle by actuation of various mechanisms in the handle. Mechanical motion may be transmitted from the handle through the flexible shaft to the end effector by flexible cables or rods within the flexible shaft. For example, in one embodiment two cables are used to provide articulation; one push-pull style cable opens and closes the jaws; and a second push-pull style cable actuates the knife assembly. The device is adapted to be placed in a lumen of a flexible endoscope and then inserted into a natural orifice of a patient and transited endoluminally through the anatomy of the natural lumen to a treatment site within or outside the natural lumen.

Turning now to FIGS. 1-3, one embodiment of an endoscopic vessel sealing forceps 10 is shown for use with various surgical procedures and generally includes a housing 20, a handle assembly 30, a rotating assembly 80, an articulation assembly 90, a trigger assembly 70 and an end effector assembly 100 which mutually cooperate to rotate, articulate, grasp, seal and divide tubular vessels and vascular tissue. Although the majority of the figures depict a bipolar sealing forceps 10 for use in connection with endoscopic surgical procedures, the present disclosure may be used for monopolar surgical procedures which employ a remote patient pad for completing the current loop.

Forceps 10 includes a generally flexible shaft 12 which has a distal end 16 dimensioned to mechanically engage the end effector assembly 100 and a proximal end 14 which mechanically engages the housing 20. In one embodiment, the shaft 12 has at least two portions, a proximal portion and a distal portion. The proximal portion of the shaft may be formed of a flexible tubing (e.g., plastic) and may incorporate a tube of braided steel to provide axial (e.g., compressional) and rotational strength. The distal portion of shaft 12 may be also be flexible, but may incorporate one or more moving joints. A casing 12' may be employed to protect a plurality of internal moving joints 12a of the flexible shaft 12.

In one embodiment, the proximal portion of the shaft is flexible and non-articulating while the distal portion of shaft 12 is capable of articulating in response to movement of articulation cables or wires. Details of how the shaft 12 flexes are described in more detail below with respect to FIGS. 8 and

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9. The proximal end **14** of shaft **12** is received within the housing **20** and connected to the rotating assembly **80**, articulating assembly **90** and drive assembly **150**. In the drawings and in the descriptions which follow, the term “proximal,” as is traditional, will refer to the end of the forceps **10** which is closer to the user, while the term “distal” will refer to the end which is farther from the user.

As best seen in FIG. 1, forceps **10** also includes an electro-surgical cable **310** which connects the forceps **10** to a source of electrosurgical energy, e.g., a generator (not shown). It is contemplated that generators such as those sold by Covidien—Energy-based Devices, located in Boulder, Colo. may be used as a source of electrosurgical energy, e.g., Covidien’s LIGASURE™ Vessel Sealing Generator and Covidien’s Force Triad™ Generator.

The generator may include various safety and performance features including isolated output, independent activation of accessories and/or so-called “Instant Response™” software which is a proprietary technology owned by Covidien. Instant Response™ is an advanced feedback system which senses changes in tissue 200 times per second and adjusts voltage and current to maintain appropriate power. The Instant Response™ technology is believed to provide one or more of the following benefits to vessel sealing: consistent clinical effect through all tissue types; reduced thermal spread and risk of collateral tissue damage; less need to “turn up the generator”; and designed for the minimally invasive environment.

Cable **310** is internally divided into cable lead **310a**, **310b** and **310c** which each transmit electrosurgical energy through their respective feed paths through the forceps **10** to the end effector assembly **100** as explained in more detail below with respect to FIGS. **10** and **11**.

Handle assembly **30** includes a fixed handle **50** and a movable handle **40**. Fixed handle **50** is integrally associated with housing **20** and handle **40** is movable relative to fixed handle **50** as explained in more detail below with respect to the operation of the forceps **10**. Rotating assembly **80** may be integrally associated with the housing **20** and is rotatable via rotating wheel **82** approximately 180 degrees in either direction about a longitudinal axis “A-A” defined through shaft **12**. One envisioned rotating assembly **80** is disclosed in commonly-owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/460,926, which has been incorporated by reference above. Another envisioned rotating assembly is disclosed in commonly-owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/519,586, the entire content of which is incorporated by reference herein.

Articulation assembly **90** may also be integrally associated with housing **20** and operable via wheel **92** to move the end effector assembly **100** in the direction of arrows “B-B” relative to axis “A-A”. Wheel **92** may be provided in alternative arrangements such as disposed on the side of housing. Also, wheel **92** may be replaced by other mechanisms to actuate the articulation assembly **90** such as levers, trackballs, joysticks, or the like. Details relating to the articulation assembly **90** are explained in more detail below with reference to FIGS. **8** and **9**.

As mentioned above, end effector assembly **100** is attached at the distal end **16** of shaft **12** and includes a pair of opposing jaw members **110** and **120**. Movable handle **40** of handle assembly **30** is ultimately connected to a drive assembly **150** which, together, mechanically cooperate to impart movement of the jaw members **110** and **120** from an open position wherein the jaw members **110** and **120** are disposed in spaced relation relative to one another, to a clamping or closed position wherein the jaw members **110** and **120** cooperate to grasp tissue therebetween.

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Turning now to the more detailed features of the present forceps housing **20**, shaft **12** and end effector assembly **100**, movable handle **40** is selectively movable about a pivot pin **29** from a first position relative to fixed handle **50** to a second position in closer proximity to the fixed handle **50** which, as explained below, imparts movement of the jaw members **110** and **120** relative to one another. The movable handle includes a clevis **45** which forms a pair of upper flanges each having an aperture at an upper end thereof for receiving the pivot pin **29** therethrough. In turn, pin **29** mounts to opposing sides of the housing **20**.

Clevis **45** also includes a force-actuating flange or drive flange (not shown) which aligns along longitudinal axis “A-A” and which abuts the drive assembly **150** such that pivotal movement of the handle **40** forces actuating flange against the drive assembly **150** which, in turn, closes the jaw members **110** and **120**. A lower end of the movable handle **40** includes a flange **91** which is mounted to the movable handle **40** and which includes a t-shaped distal end **95** that rides within a predefined channel **51** disposed within fixed handle **50** to lock the movable handle **40** relative to the fixed handle **50**.

The end effector assembly **100** includes opposing jaw members **110** and **120** which cooperate to effectively grasp tissue for sealing purposes. The end effector assembly **100** may be designed as a unilateral assembly, i.e., jaw member **120** is fixed relative to the shaft **12** and jaw member **110** pivots about a pivot pin **103** to grasp tissue or a bilateral assembly, i.e., both jaw members **110** and **120** move relative to axis “A-A”. A drive rod **142** or drive sleeve is operably coupled to the drive assembly **150** and is selectively reciprocable via movement of handle **40** relative to handle **50** to actuate, i.e., pivot, the jaw members **110** and **120** relative to one another. In an embodiment of the device, drive rod **142** is flexible, and may be, for example, a cable.

In one particular embodiment according to the present disclosure and as best illustrated in FIGS. **1-3**, a knife channel **115a** and **115b** may be defined in the upper and/or lower jaw member **110** and **120**, respectively. The knife channel **115a** and **115b** is dimensioned to run through the center of the jaw members **110** and **120**, respectively, such that a blade **185** may be selectively reciprocated to cut the tissue grasped between the jaw members **110** and **120** when the jaw members **110** and **120** are in a closed position. Blade **185** may be configured (or the blade **185** in combination with the end effector assembly **100** or drive assembly **150**) such that the blade **185** may only be advanced through tissue when the jaw members **110** and **120** are closed thus preventing accidental or premature activation of the blade **185** through the tissue.

As best shown in FIGS. **2** and **3**, jaw member **110** includes an insulative jaw housing **114** and an electrically conductive surface **112**. Insulator **114** is dimensioned to securely engage the electrically conductive sealing surface **112** by stamping, by overmolding, by overmolding a stamped electrically conductive sealing plate and/or by overmolding a metal injection molded seal plate. All of these manufacturing techniques produce jaw member **110** having an electrically conductive surface **112** which is substantially surrounded by an insulative jaw housing **114**. Jaw member **110** may also include one or more wire guides or channels (not shown) which are designed to guide cable lead **311** into electrical continuity with sealing surface **112**.

Electrically conductive surface **112** and insulative jaw housing **114**, when assembled, form a longitudinally-oriented slot **115a** defined therethrough for reciprocation of the knife blade **185**. It is envisioned that the knife channel **115a** cooperates with a corresponding knife channel **115b** defined

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in jaw member **120** to facilitate longitudinal extension of the knife blade **185** along a preferred cutting plane to effectively and accurately separate the tissue along the formed tissue seal.

Jaw member **120** includes similar elements to jaw member **110** such as an insulative jaw housing **124** and an electrically conductive sealing surface **122** which is dimensioned to securely engage the insulative jaw housing **124**. Likewise, the electrically conductive surface **122** and the insulative jaw housing **124**, when assembled, include a longitudinally-oriented channel **115a** defined therethrough for reciprocation of the knife blade **185**. As mentioned above, when the jaw members **110** and **120** are closed about tissue, knife channels **115a** and **115b** allow longitudinal extension of the knife **185** in a distal fashion to sever tissue along the tissue seal. A single knife channel, e.g., **115b**, may be completely disposed in one of the two jaw members, e.g., jaw member **120**, depending upon a particular purpose. Jaw member **120** may be assembled in a similar manner as described above with respect to jaw member **110**.

Jaw member **120** includes a series of stop members **750** disposed on the inner facing surfaces of the electrically conductive sealing surface **122** to facilitate gripping and manipulation of tissue and to define a gap "G" (see FIG. 7) between opposing jaw members **110** and **120** during sealing and cutting of tissue. The preferred gap "G" between the conductive sealing surfaces **112** and **122** to effectively and reliably seal tissue is between about 0.001 and about 0.006 inches. Stop members **750** may be employed on one or both jaw members **110** and **120** depending upon a particular purpose or to achieve a desired result. Stop members **750** may be thermally sprayed atop the electrically conductive sealing plate **122** or deposited or affixed in any other known fashion in the art. Moreover, the stop members **750** may be disposed in any configuration along the electrically conductive jaw surfaces **112** and **122** depending upon a particular jaw configuration or desired surgical result.

In one embodiment, jaw members **110** and **120** are engaged to the end of shaft **12** (or a sleeve (not shown) surrounding shaft **12**) and are operable (via rotating assembly **80**) to rotate about pivot **103** of the end effector assembly **100**. Lead **311** carries a first electrical potential to jaw member **110** and a second electrical potential is transferred through drive rod **142** (or, alternatively, the above mentioned sleeve) to jaw member **120**. Upon activation, the two electrical potentials transmit electrical energy through tissue held between conductive seal plates **112** and **122**. Details relating to one envisioned electrical configuration of the lead **311** through forces **10** are discussed with reference to FIGS. **10** and **11** below.

Proximal movement of the drive rod **142** pivots the jaw members **110** and **120** to a closed position. More particularly, once actuated, handle **40** moves in a generally arcuate fashion towards fixed handle **50** about pivot pin **29** which forces clevis **45** to pull reciprocating drive rod **142** in a generally proximal direction to close the jaw members **110** and **120**. Moreover, proximal rotation of the handle **40** causes the locking flange **71** to release, i.e., "unlock", the trigger assembly **70** for selective actuation of the knife **185**.

The operating features and relative movements of the internal working components of one envisioned forceps **10**, i.e., drive assembly **150**, trigger assembly **70** and rotational assembly **80** are all described in commonly-owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/460,926, the entire contents of which are incorporated by reference above.

As mentioned above, the jaw members **110** and **120** may be opened, closed, rotated and articulated to manipulate and grasp tissue until sealing is desired. This enables the user to

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position and re-position the forceps **10** prior to activation and sealing. As illustrated in FIG. **4**, the end effector assembly **100** is rotatable about longitudinal axis "A-A" through rotation of the rotating knob **82** of rotating assembly **80**. The end effector assembly **100** may also be articulated in either direction in the direction of arrows "B-B" as explained in more detail below with reference to FIGS. **8** and **9**. Once the tissue is grasped (within the required pressure range of about 3 kg/cm² to about 16 kg/cm²), the user then selectively applies electrosurgical energy to effectively seal tissue. Once sealed, the user then selectively advances the knife **185** by actuating the trigger assembly **70** to cut the tissue along the tissue seal.

The operating features and relative movements of one envisioned trigger assembly **70** are described in the above-mentioned commonly-owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/460,926. In one embodiment, for example, actuation of the trigger assembly **70** causes a cable extending through shaft **12** and operatively coupled to knife **185** to move distally to thereby cut tissue along the tissue seal. In another embodiment, trigger assembly includes gearing that translates actuation of the trigger assembly to rotational motion of a cable extending through shaft **12**.

One envisioned drive assembly **150** is also disclosed in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/460,926 which involves the selective reciprocation of a sleeve to open and close the jaw members **110** and **120**. Another envisioned embodiment is described in U.S. application Ser. No. 11/519,586 wherein the drive assembly pulls a drive rod to open and close the jaw members **110** and **120**.

With particular respect to FIGS. **2** and **3**, the forceps **10** includes a plurality of joints **12a** which are nestingly arranged in series to form flexible shaft **12**. The distal end **16** of shaft **12** mechanically engages the end effector assembly **100** and the proximal end **14** of the shaft **12** mechanically engages the housing **20**. Each of the plurality of joints **12a** of the flexible shaft **12** includes a distal knuckle **12b** and a proximal clevis **12c** formed therewith. Each knuckle **12b** operatively engages a clevis **12c** of an adjacent joint **12a**. Each joint **12a** defines a central lumen **12d** formed therein and a pair of opposed lumens **12e** formed on either side of central lumen **12d**. A pair of articulation cables **94a** and **94b** slideably extend through respective lumens **12e** of joints **12**. The operation of cables **94a** and **94b** is explained in further detail below with respect to FIGS. **8** and **9**.

As seen in FIG. **3**, end effector assembly **100** includes a jaw support member **222** which is configured to pivotably support jaw members **110** and **120**. Jaw support member **222** defines a lumen **224** in a proximal end thereof and a pair of spaced apart arms **226a** and **226b** in a distal end thereof. Lumen **224** is configured and dimensioned to receive a stem **12f** extending from a distal-most joint **12a** of flexible shaft **12**. Lumen **224** defines a pair of opposed channels **224a**, **224b** in a surface thereof which are configured to slidably receive the knife blade **185** for reciprocation therein.

Jaws **110** and **120** are pivotably mounted on support member **222** by a jaw pivot pin **234** which extends through apertures **228** formed in arms **226a** and **226b** of support member **222** and respective pivot slots **132a**, **132b** formed in jaw members **110** and **120**. To move jaws **110** and **120** between an open position and a closed position, an axially or longitudinally movable center rod **136** having a camming pin **138** is mounted within jaw support **222** at the center rod's **136** distal end **136a** thereof. Camming pin **138** rides in and engages angled camming slots **132a** and **132b** formed in respective jaw members **110** and **120** such that axial or longitudinal movement of the center rod **136** via drive rod **142** causes jaws **110** and **120** to cam between open and closed positions.

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End effector assembly **100** also includes a keyed rod **140** having a distal end **140a** rotatably connected to a proximal end **136b** of center rod **136**. Keyed rod **140** includes a proximal end **140b** fixedly connected to a distal end of drive rod **142**, and a body portion **140c**, disposed between distal end **140a** and proximal end **140b**, having a non-circular cross-sectional profile.

End effector assembly **100** further includes a camming assembly **141** including a camming hub **144** having a lumen **144a** defined therethrough configured and adapted to slidably receive body portion **140c** of keyed rod **140** therein. Camming hub **144** includes a mating mechanical interface defined therein which cooperates with the outer peripheral configuration of body portion **140c** of keyed rod **140** to allow positive engagement of the two component halves for rotational purposes as explained in more detail below. The camming hub **144** also includes a helical or spiral groove **144b** defined in an outer surface thereof which is configured to mechanically engage a detent **187** of the knife **185** the purpose of which is also explained in more detail below. Camming hub **144** is configured for rotatable disposition within lumen **124** of support member **222**. In an alternative embodiment, camming hub **144** may be replaced by other mechanisms to translate rotational motion to linear motion (e.g., a lead screw, one or more gears, and the like).

In operation, the drive rod **142** is configured to provide two distinct and separate functions: axial displacement thereof actuates the jaw members **110** and **120** between the open to closed positions and rotational movement thereof advances the knife **185** through tissue. More particularly, axial displacement of drive rod **142** imparts axial displacement to keyed rod **140** which, in turn, imparts axial displacement to center rod **136**. However, since camming hub **144** is axially slidably supported on keyed rod **140**, no axial displacement is imparted thereto. As best shown in FIGS. **5** and **6**, proximal translation of the drive rod **142** in the direction of arrow "F" forces camming pin **138** proximally within camming slots **132a** and **132b** to close the jaw members **110** and **120** about tissue with the requisite closure pressure and within the requisite gap "G" range. In an alternative embodiment (not shown), the functions actuated by drive rod **142** may be reversed with axial displacement advancing the knife **185** and rotational motion opening and closing jaw members **110** and **120**. The electrically conductive sealing plates **112** and **122** are then energized to transmit electrical energy through tissue held between the jaw members **110** and **120**.

One or more safety features may be employed either mechanically within the forceps **10** or electrically within the generator (not shown) to assure that tissue is effectively grasped between the jaw members **110** and **120** before energy is supplied.

Once a proper tissue seal is formed, the tissue may be severed along the tissue seal. Again, one or more safety features may be employed to assure that a proper seal has been formed prior to severing tissue. For example, the generator may include a safety lockout which electrically prevents or electro-mechanically prevents actuation of the knife **185** unless a proper and effective seal has been formed. As mentioned above, it is also important to note that vessel or tissue sealing is more than simply coagulating tissue and requires precise control of pressure, energy and gap "G" to effectively seal tissue.

The present disclosure incorporates a knife **185** which, when activated via the trigger assembly **70**, progressively and selectively divides the tissue along an ideal tissue plane in precise manner to effectively and reliably divide the tissue into two sealed halves. The knife **185** allows the user to

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quickly separate the tissue immediately after sealing without substituting a cutting instrument through a cannula or trocar port. As can be appreciated, accurate sealing and dividing of tissue is accomplished with the same forceps **10**.

It is envisioned that knife blade **185** may also be coupled to the same or an alternative electrosurgical energy source to facilitate separation of the tissue along the tissue seal. Moreover, it is envisioned that the angle of the knife blade tip **185a** may be dimensioned to provide more or less aggressive cutting angles depending upon a particular purpose. For example, the knife blade **185** may be positioned at an angle which reduces "tissue wisps" associated with cutting. Moreover, the knife blade **185** may be designed having different blade geometries such as serrated, notched, perforated, hollow, concave, convex etc. depending upon a particular purpose or to achieve a particular result. It is envisioned that the knife **185** generally cuts in a progressive, uni-directional fashion (i.e., distally). As mentioned above, the drive rod performs two functions, opening and closing the jaw members **110** and **120** and advancing the knife **185** to sever tissue (see FIG. **7**). In order to sever the tissue, rotation of drive rod **142** imparts rotation to keyed rod **140** which, in turn, imparts rotation to camming hub **144**. However, since keyed rod **140** is rotatably connected to center rod **136**, no rotation is imparted thereto.

End effector assembly **100** is operably coupled to a knife **185** which is slidably supported within respective channels **224a** and **224b** of support member **222**. More particularly, knife **185** includes a sharpened or serrated edge **185a** at a distal end thereof and a pair of guide flanges **186a** and **186b** which extend proximally therefrom. The proximal end of flange **186a** includes a detent or protrusion **187** which is configured to engage and ride within spiral or helical groove **144b** defined in camming hub **144**.

In operation, as camming hub **144** is rotated in direction of arrow "C", proximal end **187** rides within groove **144b** of camming hub **144** and moves in an axial direction "A1" relative thereto. Rotation of the camming hub **144** in one direction forces the blade **185** distally through knife channels **115a** and **115b** in jaw members **110** and **120**, respectively, to sever tissue disposed therebetween. Rotation in the opposite direction forces proximal end **187** proximally to retract blade **185** to a proximal-most position. A spring may be operatively associated with the camming hub **144** to bias the knife **185** in a proximal-most orientation.

As mentioned above, the end effector assembly **100** may also be selectively articulated. More particularly, as seen in FIG. **8** with end effector assembly **100** in an axially aligned condition, in order to articulate end effector assembly **100** via articulation assembly **90**, wheel **92** is configured to rotate in a first direction to move end effector assembly **100** in a corresponding first direction and rotate in an opposite direction to move end effector assembly **100** in an opposite direction. Various pulley assemblies and gearing assemblies may be employed to accomplish this purpose.

For example, in one embodiment, the handle assembly may include at least one articulation cable operable from the housing. Each articulation cable includes a distal end operatively connectable with an end effector and a proximal end operatively connected to at least one of a control element, such as, for example, a slider, dial, lever, or the like, supported on the housing. In operation, movement of the control element results in movement of the at least one articulation cable, wherein movement of the at least one articulation cable in a first direction causes an articulation of the end effector and

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movement of the at least one articulation cable in a second direction results in articulation of the end effector in a second direction.

A pair of articulation cables may be provided each having a proximal end operatively connected to the control element such that movement of the control element in a first direction results in movement of a first articulation cable in a first direction and movement of a second articulation cable in a second direction; and movement of the control element in a second direction results in movement of the first articulation cable in the second direction and movement of the second articulation cable in the first direction.

More particularly and with reference to FIGS. 8 and 9, when first articulation **94b** cable (i.e., the lower articulation cable as depicted in FIGS. 8 and 9) is withdrawn in a proximal direction via wheel **92**, as indicated by arrow "D" of FIG. 9, a distal end of articulation cable **94b**, anchored to a distal-most joint **12a**, rotates about the interface between knuckles **112b** and clevis **112c** thereby causing gaps defined therebetween, along a side surface thereof, to constrict. In so doing, end effector assembly **100** is articulated in a downward direction, in the direction of arrow "B", i.e., in a direction transverse to longitudinal axis "A-A". In order to return end effector assembly **100** to an un-articulated condition or to articulate end effector assembly **100** in an opposite direction, articulation cable **94a** (i.e., the upper articulation cable as depicted in FIGS. 8 and 9) may be withdrawn in a proximal direction by rotation of wheel **92** in an opposite direction.

Various handles and/or handle assemblies may be operatively connected or otherwise associated with end effector assembly **100** in order to effect operation and movement of the various components thereof, i.e., drive cable **142** and/or articulation cables **94a**, **94b**. Exemplary handles and/or handle assemblies for use with end effector **1100** are disclosed in U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/849,562 filed on Oct. 5, 2006, entitled "PROGRAMMABLE HANDLE ASSEMBLY FOR SURGICAL DEVICES"; and U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/849,560 filed on Oct. 5, 2006, entitled "HANDLE ASSEMBLY FOR ARTICULATED ENDOSCOPIC INSTRUMENTS", the entire disclosures of each of which being incorporated herein by reference.

FIGS. 10 and 11 show one envisioned embodiment wherein the electrical leads **310a**, **310b**, **310c** and **311** are fed through the housing **20** by electrosurgical cable **310**. More particularly, the electrosurgical cable **310** is fed into the bottom of the housing **20** through fixed handle **50**. Lead **310c** extends directly from cable **310** into the rotating assembly **80** and connects (via a fused clip or spring clip or the like) to drive rod **142** to conduct the second electrical potential to jaw member **120**. Leads **310a** and **310b** extend from cable **310** and connect to the hand switch or joy-stick-like toggle switch **400**.

In one embodiment, switch **400** may include an ergonomically dimensioned toggle plate **405** which may conform to the outer shape of housing **20** (once assembled). It is envisioned that the switch **400** permits the user to selectively activate the forceps **10** in a variety of different orientations, i.e., multi-oriented activation. As can be appreciated, this simplifies activation. A pair of prongs **404a** and **404b** extend distally and mate with a corresponding pair of mechanical interfaces **21a** and **21b** disposed within housing **20**. Toggle plate **405** mechanically mates with a switch button **402** which, in turn, connects to an electrical interface **401**. The electrical leads **310a** and **310b** are electrically connected to electrical interface **401**. When the toggle plate **405** is depressed, trigger lead **311** carries the first electrical potential to jaw member **110**.

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More particularly, lead **311** extends from interface **401** through the rotating assembly **80** and along a portion of shaft **12** to eventually connect to the jaw member **110**. Lead **310c** connects directly to either drive shaft **142** which ultimately connects to jaw member **120** or may be configured to extend directly to jaw member **120** to carry the second electrical potential.

It is envisioned that a safety switch or circuit (not shown) may be employed such that the switch cannot fire unless the jaw members **110** and **120** are closed and/or unless the jaw members **110** and **120** have tissue held therebetween. In the latter instance, a sensor (not shown) may be employed to determine if tissue is held therebetween. In addition, other sensor mechanisms may be employed which determine pre-surgical, concurrent surgical (i.e., during surgery) and/or post surgical conditions. The sensor mechanisms may also be utilized with a closed-loop feedback system coupled to the electrosurgical generator to regulate the electrosurgical energy based upon one or more pre-surgical, concurrent surgical or post surgical conditions. U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/427,832 describes one such feedback system, the entire contents of which being incorporated by reference herein.

As mentioned above, at least one jaw member, e.g., **120**, may include a stop member **750** which limits the movement of the two opposing jaw members **110** and **120** relative to one another. In one embodiment, the stop member **750** extends from the sealing surface **122** a predetermined distance according to the specific material properties (e.g., compressive strength, thermal expansion, etc.) to yield a consistent and accurate gap distance "G" during sealing. It is envisioned for the gap distance between opposing sealing surfaces **112** and **122** during sealing ranges from about 0.001 inches to about 0.006 inches and, more preferably, between about 0.002 and about 0.003 inches. In one embodiment, the non-conductive stop members **750** are molded onto the jaw members **110** and **120** (e.g., overmolding, injection molding, etc.), stamped onto the jaw members **110** and **120** or deposited (e.g., deposition) onto the jaw members **110** and **120**. For example, one technique involves thermally spraying a ceramic material onto the surface of the jaw member **110** and **120** to form the stop members **750**. Several thermal spraying techniques are contemplated which involve depositing a broad range of heat resistant and insulative materials on various surfaces to create stop members **750** for controlling the gap distance between electrically conductive surfaces **112** and **122**.

FIGS. 15-21 show an alternate embodiment of an electrosurgical articulating forceps **1000** for use with vessel sealing procedures. May of the aforescribed features of forceps **1000** are similar to forceps **10** and for the purposes of consistency, these features are hereby incorporated in the following discussion of forceps **1000** which is discussed below in a more abbreviated form.

Operation of forceps **1000** is similar to forceps **10** and includes movable handle **1040** which is movable relative to the fixed handle **1050**. Movable handle **1040** is selectively moveable about a pair of pivots **1047** and **1057** (See FIG. 14C) from a first position relative to fixed handle **1050** to a second position in closer proximity to the fixed handle **1050** which, as explained below, imparts movement of the jaw members **1110** and **1120** relative to one another. In turn, each pivot **1047** and **1057** mounts to a respective housing half **1020a** and **1020b**.

Handle **1040** is operatively coupled to a pair of linkages **1042** and **1045** which upon movement of handle **1040** impart corresponding movement to the drive assembly **1700** as

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explained in more detail below. The arrangement of the handles **1040** and **1050**, pivots **1047** and **1057** and linkages **1042** and **1045** provide a distinct mechanical advantage over conventional handle assemblies and allows the user to gain lever-like mechanical advantage to actuate the jaw members **1110** and **1120**. This reduces the overall amount of mechanical force necessary to close the jaw members **1110** and **1120** to effect a tissue seal.

Much like the embodiment described with respect FIGS. **1-14**, the lower end of the movable handle **1040** includes a flange **1044** which includes a t-shaped distal end **1044'** that rides within a predefined channel **1051** disposed within fixed handle **1050**. The t-shaped distal end **1044'** lock the movable handle **1040** relative to the fixed handle **1050** and as explained in more detail below.

End effector assembly **1100** includes opposing jaw members **1110** and **1120** which cooperate to effectively grasp tissue for sealing purposes. The end effector assembly **1100** is designed as a unilateral assembly, i.e., jaw member **1120** is fixed relative to the shaft **1012** and jaw member **1110** pivots about a pivot pin **1134** to grasp tissue. More particularly, the unilateral end effector assembly **1100** includes one stationary or fixed jaw member **1120** mounted in fixed relation to the shaft **1012** and pivoting jaw member **1110** mounted about a pivot pin **1134** attached to the stationary jaw member **1120**. A reciprocating sleeve **1230** is slidably disposed within the shaft **1012** and is remotely operable by the drive assembly **1700**. The pivoting jaw member **1110** includes a detent or protrusion **1113** which extends from jaw member **1110** through an aperture **1232** disposed within the reciprocating sleeve **1230** (FIG. **14A**). The pivoting jaw member **1110** is actuated by sliding the sleeve **1230** axially within the shaft **1012** such that a distal end of the aperture **1232** abuts against the detent **1113** on the pivoting jaw member **1110** (See FIGS. **16A-17B**). Pulling the sleeve **1230** proximally closes the jaw members **1110** and **1120** about tissue grasped therebetween and pushing the sleeve **1230** distally opens the jaw members **1110** and **1120** relative to one another for grasping purposes.

Unilateral end effector assembly **1100** may be structured such that electrical energy can be routed through the sleeve **1230** at the protrusion **1113** contact point with the sleeve **1230** or using a "brush" or lever (not shown) to contact the back of the moving jaw member **1110** when the jaw member **1110** closes. In this instance, the electrical energy would be routed through the protrusion **1113** to one of the jaw members **1110** or **1120**. Alternatively, an electrical cable lead **1455** may be routed to energize one of the jaw members, e.g., jaw member **1120**, and the other electrical potential may be conducted through the sleeve **1230** via electrical contact with lead **1450** (See FIG. **16C**) and transferred to the pivoting jaw member **1110** which establishes electrical continuity upon retraction of the sleeve **1230**.

Jaw members **1110** and **1120** include similar elements to jaw members **110** and **120** as described above such as jaw insulators **114** and **124** and electrically conductive sealing surfaces **112** and **122** (See FIG. **13**), respectively. Jaw member **1120** also includes a series of stop members **750** (See FIG. **16B**) disposed on the inner facing surface of electrically conductive sealing surface **1122** to facilitate gripping and manipulation of tissue and to define a gap "G" (See FIG. **17A**) between opposing jaw members **1110** and **1120** during sealing and/or cutting of tissue. It is envisioned that the series of stop members **750** may be employed on one or both jaw members **1110** and **1120** in a variety of configurations depending upon a particular purpose or to achieve a desired result.

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Articulation assembly **1090** is operatively coupled to housing **1020**. Articulation wheels **1090a** and **1090b** may be provided in alternative arrangements such as disposed on the side of housing **1020**. It is envisioned that wheels **1090a** and **1090b** may be replaced by other mechanisms to actuate the articulation assembly **1090** such as levers, trackballs, joysticks, or the like.

More particularly, as seen in the comparison of FIGS. **18A-18C** upon selective rotation of one of the wheels **1090a**, **1090b**, the end effector assembly **1100** may be articulated from an axially aligned condition (FIG. **18B**) to an articulated condition (FIG. **18C**). In order to articulate end effector assembly **1100** via articulation assembly **1090**, wheels **1090a** and **1090b** are configured to rotate in a first direction to move end effector assembly **1100** in a corresponding first direction and rotate in an opposite direction to move end effector assembly **1100** in an opposite direction. Various pulley assemblies and gearing assemblies may be employed to accomplish this purpose.

For example and similar to the articulation arrangement described above, two articulation cables **1094a** and **1094b** may be utilized to articulate the flexible portion **1012b** of shaft **1012**. As best seen in FIG. **16C**, each articulation cable **1094a** and **1094b** includes a distal end **1094a'** and **1094b'** which operatively connects with an end effector coupling assembly **1016** disposed at the distal end of shaft **1012**. Coupling assembly **1016** includes a cavity **1225** defined therein configured to receive a series of mechanically inter-cooperating elements which are designed to engage the drive rod **1142** for reciprocation therein as well as guide the various electrical connections to the jaw members **1110** and **1120**. The drive rod **1142** is preferably made from a flexible, friction-reducing material to allow the drive rod **1142** to bend in a given direction when the forceps **1000** is articulated. The friction-reducing material reduces buckling during articulation.

Coupling assembly includes a pair of bushings **1220** and **1240** which engage and secure a distal end **1142'** of the drive rod **1142** to the drive sleeve **1230** via pin **1231**. Bushing **1240** is slidably engaged atop drive rod **1142** proximal to end **1142'** and bushing **1220** is configured to engage bushing **1240** and secure end **1142'** therebetween. Pin **1231** couples the secured bushings **1240** and **1220** and drive rod **1142** to drive sleeve **1230**. The drive sleeve **1230** (and secured drive rod **1142**) is received within cavity **1225** for sliding translation therein upon actuation of the drive assembly **1700** as explained in more detail below.

Coupling assembly **1016** also includes a locking element **1210** which is configured to engage a proximal end **1117** of jaw member **1120** to lock the coupling assembly **1016** (and drive rod **1142**) in fixed relation relative to jaw member **1120** to limit any rotational movement therebetween. The coupling assembly **1016** also includes a distal flange **1017** which supports the lower jaw member **1120** once assembled (See FIG. **14A**). As best shown in FIG. **16C**, the coupling assembly **1016** also supports the electrical connection between lead **1450** and driving sleeve **1230**. In addition, coupling assembly **1016** also guides electrical lead **1455** (shown in phantom) therethrough for connection to jaw member **1110**.

In operation, movement of one of the articulation wheels **1090a** and **1090b** results in movement of the articulation cables **1094a** and **1094b** in opposite directions. More particularly, and as best shown in FIGS. **14C**, **18A**, **20A** and **20B**, the articulation assembly **1090** include wheels **1090a** and **1090b** which matingly couple to corresponding gear members **1096a** and **1096b** disposed on respective sides of housing **1020a** and **1020b** (See FIG. **20A**). A hexagonal axle **1095** is

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mounted through both gear members **1096a** and **1096b** and capped on either end by wheels **1090a** and **1090b**. The axle **1095** is secured within the gear members **1096a** and **1096b** by mechanically mating surfaces (friction fit, geometric fit, etc.) or in other ways customary in the trade. The gear-like arrangement of the wheels **1090a** and **1090b** allow for incremental indexing of the articulation member **1090** in a given direction and a pair of set springs **1091** on each wheel prevent recoil of the wheel in any given direction. In other words, the set springs **1091** are configured to intermesh with the gears, e.g., gear **1096b**, and allow incremental advancement in a clockwise or counter-clockwise direction. The biasing force of the set springs **1091** against the gear, e.g., gear **1096b**, is sufficient to maintain the flexible shaft **1012b** in any desired articulated position.

Axle **1095** supports pulley assembly **1600** within housing **1020** in operative association with cables **1094a** and **1094b**. More particularly, pulley assembly **1600** includes two pulleys **1610a** and **1610b** mounted for rotation atop axle **1095**. Each pulley **1610a** and **1610b** includes a corresponding guide sleeve **1620a** and **1620b** which guide the respective cable **1094a** and **1094b** atop the corresponding pulley **1610a** and **1610b** to facilitate reciprocation thereof. As best shown in FIG. **18A**, cable **1094a** is designed to engage pulley **1620b** for rotation one direction, while cable **1094b** is designed to engage pulley **1620a** for rotation in the opposite direction. As can be appreciated, this enables the pulleys **1610a** and **1610b** to operate in a push-pull manner to articulate the flexible shaft **1012b**. In other words, as one cable **1094a** is being pulled in the direction of **P1**, the other cable **1094b** is being pushed (or relaxed) in the direction of **P2** to allow the flexible shaft **1012b** to articulate in a given direction (See FIG. **18C**). The guide sleeves **1620a** and **1620b** also pre-tension the respective cables **1094b** and **1094a** to facilitate and enhance consistent articulation of the flexible shaft **1012b**.

As best seen in FIG. **14B**, the drive assembly **1700** also includes a fine adjustment assembly **1061** operably associated with drive rod **1142** which allows a manufacturer to finely adjust the opening of the jaw members **1110** and **1120** relative to one another prior to final assembly. More particularly, the drive rod **1142** is connected to an adapter **1063** which, in turn, connects to drive rod **1142a** connected to drive assembly **1700** as describe below. Adapter **1063** is threaded at a distal end thereof to threadably engage an adjustment knob **1067** to allow a manufacturer to finely adjust the length of the drive rod **1142** relative to the drive assembly **1700** thereby allowing the relative separation distance of the jaw members **1110** and **1120** to be accurately and finely controlled.

As best shown in FIGS. **14C**, **15A**, **15B**, **19A** and **19B**, actuation of the drive assembly **1700** allows a user to selectively open and close the jaw members **1110** and **1120** to grasp and seal tissue. More particularly, the drive assembly **1700** includes a frame block **1800** which operably mounts a compression spring **1740** that biases the drive rod **1142** and coupling drive rod **1142a** thereagainst. The coupling drive rod **1142a** mounts to a drive block **1710** which, in turn, is coupled to the distal end of frame block **1800** by adapter **1720**. When assembled, the frame block **1800** is disposed between opposing rails **1021** defined in housing halves **1020a** and **1020b** (See FIG. **14C**) which permit the frame block **1800** to move within the housing **1020** upon actuation of handle **1040**. Spring **1740** is mounted between a spacer **1730** (disposed adjacent adapter block **1720**) and the proximal end **1810** of frame block **1800**. A drive pin **1750** mounts to the opposite end of drive block **1710** and supports the compression spring **1740** to enable movement of the drive rod **1142**.

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As mentioned above, handle **1040** is operable mounted to the drive assembly **1700** such that movement of the handle **1040** relative to handle **1050** translates the drive rod **1142** to open and close the jaw members **1110** and **1120**. More particularly, handle **1040** is mounted at a top or distal end thereof via pin **1047** to link **1045** which, in turn, mounts to frame block **1800** also via pin **1047**. Handle **1040** is also mounted to link **1042** at pivot point **1041** which, in turn, mounts to handle **1050** at pivot **1057** to complete the four bar mechanical assembly. As best shown in the comparison of FIGS. **19A** and **19B**, movement of handle **1040** towards handle **1050** rotates the two links **1042** and **1045** to force the frame block **1800** proximally and pull the drive rod **1142a** proximally (which pulls drive rod **1142** proximally) to close the jaw members **1110** and **1120**. At the same time, flange **1044** operably coupled to the bottom of handle **1040**, reciprocates into a guide channel **1051** defined in handle **1050** such that a t-shaped end **1044'** locks the handle **1040** in place relative to handle **1050**. Flange **1044** and channel **1051** operate in a similar manner as described above with respect to forceps **10**.

Spring **1740** includes two opposing compression discs **1740a** and **1740b** disposed therein which slidably mount atop drive pin **1750**. Upon movement of handle **1040** towards handle **1050**, spring disc **1740a** is forced by movement of adapter **1720** to compress atop drive pin **1750** and pull the drive rod **1142** proximally. As mentioned above, movement of the drive rod **1142** proximally, causes the drive sleeve **1230** to engage flange **1113** of jaw member **1110** and close jaw members **1110** relative to jaw member **1120**. Flange **1044** thereafter locks the handle **1040** relative to handle **1050** by virtue of the t-shaped end **1044'** engaging a catch basin **1052** defined in the handle **1050**. Upon re-grasping of handle **1040**, the t-shaped end **1044'** on flange **1044** is redirected out of channel **1051** to free handle **1040** for movement away from handle **1050**. Spring **1740** biases the handle **1040** in an open orientation.

As mentioned above, jaw member **1120** may include a series of stop members **750** disposed on the inner facing surfaces of the electrically conductive sealing surface **1122** to facilitate gripping and manipulation of tissue and to define a gap "G" (see FIG. **17A**) between opposing jaw members **1110** and **1120** during sealing and cutting of tissue. The preferred gap "G" between the conductive sealing surfaces **1112** and **1122** to effectively and reliably seal tissue is between about 0.001 and about 0.006 inches. The stop members **750** may be disposed in any configuration along the electrically conductive jaw surfaces **1112** and **1122** depending upon a particular jaw configuration or desired surgical result.

The end effector assembly **1100** may also be articulated in either direction (See arrow "B-B") as shown with reference to FIG. **18A**. Once the tissue is grasped (within the required pressure range of about 3 kg/cm² to about 16 kg/cm²), the user then selectively applies electrosurgical energy to effectively seal tissue. Once sealed, the user may then selectively advances a knife (not shown) by actuating a trigger assembly (not shown) to cut the tissue along the tissue seal. The operating features and relative movements of one envisioned knife and trigger assembly are described above and also described with reference to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/460,926, the entire contents being incorporated herein.

Similar to FIGS. **2** and **3** above, the forceps **1000** includes a plurality of joints **1312** which are nestingly arranged in series to form flexible shaft **1012b**. The distal end or coupling assembly **1016** mechanically engages the end effector assembly **1100** and the proximal end **1014** of the shaft **1012** mechanically engages the housing **1020**. Each of the plurality

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of joints **1312** of the flexible shaft **1012b** includes a distal knuckle **1312a** and a proximal clevis **1312b** formed therewith. Each knuckle **1312a** operatively engages a clevis **1312b** of an adjacent joint **1312a**. Each joint **1312** has a central lumen **1317** defined therein and a pair of opposed lumens **1315a** and **1315b** formed on either side of central lumen **1317**. The articulation cables **1094a** and **1094b** slideably extend through respective lumens **1315a** and **1315b** of joints **1312**. The operation of cables **1094a** and **1094b** is explained above. The articulation cables **1094a** and **1094b** are preferably made from a flexible, friction-reducing material.

A switch **2000** is included which may conform to the outer shape of housing **1020** (once assembled). It is envisioned that the switch **2000** permits the user to selectively activate the forceps **1000** in a variety of different orientations, i.e., multi-oriented activation. As can be appreciated, this simplifies activation. A push button **2010** extends distally and engages a toggle plate **2015** (See FIG. 15B) which, in turn, connects to an electrical interface or PC Board (not shown). Electrical leads **2025a** and **2025b** internally disposed in cable **2020** (See FIG. 19) electrically connect to electrical interface or PC board. When the push button **2010** is depressed, the leads **2025a** and **2025b** carry electrical potentials to the jaw members **1110** and **1120**.

It is envisioned that a safety switch or circuit (not shown) may be employed such that the switch cannot fire unless the jaw members **1110** and **1120** are closed and/or unless the jaw members **1110** and **1120** have tissue held therebetween. In the latter instance, a sensor (not shown) may be employed to determine if tissue is held therebetween. In addition, other sensor mechanisms may be employed which determine pre-surgical, concurrent surgical (i.e., during surgery) and/or post surgical conditions. The sensor mechanisms may also be utilized with a closed-loop feedback system coupled to the electrosurgical generator to regulate the electrosurgical energy based upon one or more pre-surgical, concurrent surgical or post surgical conditions. U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/427,832 describes one such feedback system, the entire contents of which are incorporated by reference hereinabove.

Various handles and/or handle assemblies may be operatively connected or otherwise associated with end effector assembly **1100** in order to effect operation and movement of the various components thereof, i.e., drive rod **1142** and/or articulation cables **1094a**, **1094b**. Exemplary handles and/or handle assemblies for use with end effector **1100** are disclosed in U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/849,562 filed on Oct. 5, 2006, entitled "PROGRAMMABLE HANDLE ASSEMBLY FOR SURGICAL DEVICES"; and U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/849,560 filed on Oct. 5, 2006, entitled "HANDLE ASSEMBLY FOR ARTICULATED ENDOSCOPIC INSTRUMENTS", the entire disclosures of each of which being incorporated hereinabove by reference.

From the foregoing and with reference to the various figure drawings, those skilled in the art will appreciate that certain modifications can also be made to the present disclosure without departing from the scope of the same. For example, it is contemplated that the forceps **10** (and/or the electrosurgical generator used in connection with the forceps **10**) may include a sensor or feedback mechanism (not shown) which automatically selects the appropriate amount of electrosurgical energy to effectively seal the particularly-sized tissue grasped between the jaw members **110** and **120**. The sensor or feedback mechanism may also measure the impedance across the tissue during sealing and provide an indicator (visual and/or audible) that an effective seal has been created

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between the jaw members **110** and **120**. Examples of such sensor systems are described in commonly-owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/427,832 entitled "METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR CONTROLLING OUTPUT OF RF MEDICAL GENERATOR" filed on May 1, 2003 the entire contents of which are incorporated by reference hereinabove.

As can be appreciated, locating the switch **400**, **2000** on the forceps **10**, **1000** has many advantages. For example, the switch **400**, **2000** reduces the amount of electrical cable in the operating room and eliminates the possibility of activating the wrong instrument during a surgical procedure due to "line-of-sight" activation. Moreover, it is envisioned that the switch **400**, **2000** may be decommissioned during activation of the knife **185**. Decommissioning the switch **400**, **2000** when the trigger is actuated eliminates unintentionally activating the forceps **10**, **1000** during the cutting process. It is also envisioned that the switch **400**, **2000** may be disposed on another part of the forceps **10**, **1000**, e.g., the handle **40**, **1040**, rotating assembly **80**, housing **20**, etc.

Another envisioned safety mechanism would be to route one of the cable leads to energize the one jaw member, e.g., jaw member **1120**, and the other electrical potential may be conducted through a drive sleeve, e.g., drive sleeve **1230**, surrounding drive rod **1142** and transferred to the other jaw member **1110** to establish electrical continuity only upon retraction of the drive sleeve. It is envisioned that this particular envisioned embodiment will provide at least one additional safety feature, i.e., electrical continuity to the jaw members **1110** and **1120** is made only when the jaw members **1110** and **1120** are closed. The drive rod **1142** may also be energized to the second electrical potential and include a similar-type safety mechanism.

In one envisioned embodiment, the knife **185** may not be included with the forceps **10**, **1000** and the instrument is designed solely for sealing vessels or other tissue bundles. In this instance, the camming hub **144** (with respect to forceps **10** only) may be rotated to articulate the end effector assembly **100** and cables **94a** and **94b** may be eliminated.

In one embodiment, two isolated electrical leads may supply electrical energy to respective jaw members **110** and **120** (or **1110** and **1120**). In this instance it may be desirable to provide a channel along the outside of shaft **12**, **1012** which guides the electrical leads from the housing **20**, **1020** to the individual jaw members **110**, **120** (or **1110** and **1120**). One or more wire crimps or the like may be utilized to hold the electrical leads in place. Alternatively, cables **94a** and **94b** (or **1094a** and **1094b**) may be utilized to both articulate the end effector assembly **100** (or **1100**) and to supply electrical energy to the jaw members **110** and **120** (or **1110** and **1120**).

With particular respect to forceps **10** in particular but not exclusively, the cable lead, e.g., cable lead **311** of forceps **10** is held loosely but securely along the cable path to permit rotation of the jaw member **110** about pivot **103**. The two potentials are isolated from one another by virtue of the insulative sheathing surrounding cable lead **311**. Moreover, the proximal portion of shaft **12** may be rigid or substantially rigid and the distal portion is flexible and/or articulatable in the manner described in more detail above. Alternatively, the entire shaft **12** may be flexible. Still further, the trigger assembly **70** may be prevented from firing until movable handle **40** is locked (or simply moved) proximally to close the jaw members **110** and **120**.

In embodiment relating to both forceps **10**, **1000**, the electrically conductive sealing surfaces **112,122** and **1112**, **1122** of the jaw members **110**, **120** and **1110**, **1120**, respectively, are relatively flat to avoid current concentrations at sharp edges and to avoid arcing between high points. In addition

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and due to the reaction force of the tissue when engaged, jaw members **110**, **120** and **1110**, **1120** can be manufactured to resist bending. For example, the jaw members **110**, **120** and **1110**, **1120** may be tapered along the width thereof which resists bending due to the reaction force of the tissue.

It is envisioned that the outer surface of the end effector assembly **100**, **1100** may include a nickel-based material, coating, stamping, metal injection molding which is designed to reduce adhesion between the jaw members **110**, **120** and **1110**, **1120** with the surrounding tissue during activation and sealing. Moreover, it is also contemplated that the conductive surfaces **112**, **122** and **1112** and **1122** of the jaw members **110**, **120** and **1110**, **1120**, respectively, may be manufactured from one (or a combination of one or more) of the following materials: nickel-chrome, chromium nitride, MedCoat 2000 manufactured by The Electrolyzing Corporation of OHIO, inconel 600 and tin-nickel. The tissue conductive surfaces **112**, **122** and **1112** and **1122** may also be coated with one or more of the above materials to achieve the same result, i.e., a “non-stick surface”. As can be appreciated, reducing the amount that the tissue “sticks” during sealing improves the overall efficacy of the instrument.

One particular class of materials disclosed herein has demonstrated superior non-stick properties and, in some instances, superior seal quality. For example, nitride coatings which include, but not are not limited to: TiN, ZrN, TiAlN, and CrN are preferred materials used for non-stick purposes. CrN has been found to be particularly useful for non-stick purposes due to its overall surface properties and optimal performance. Other classes of materials have also been found to reducing overall sticking. For example, high nickel/chrome alloys with a Ni/Cr ratio of approximately 5:1 have been found to significantly reduce sticking in bipolar instrumentation. One particularly useful non-stick material in this class is Inconel 600. Bipolar instrumentation having sealing surfaces **112**, **122** and **1112** and **1122** made from or coated with Ni200, Ni201 (~100% Ni) also showed improved non-stick performance over typical bipolar stainless steel electrodes.

Forceps **10**, **1000** may be designed such that it is fully or partially disposable depending upon a particular purpose or to achieve a particular result. For example, end effector assembly **100**, **1100** may be selectively and releasably engageable with the distal end of the shaft **12**, **1012** and/or the proximal end **14**, **1014** of shafts **12**, **1012** may be selectively and releasably engageable with the housing **20**, **1020**. In either of these two instances, the forceps **10**, **1000** would be considered “partially disposable” or “reposable”, i.e., a new or different end effector assembly **100**, **1100** (or end effector assembly **100**, **1100** and shaft **12**, **1012**) selectively replaces the old end effector assembly **100**, **1100** as needed. As can be appreciated, the presently disclosed electrical connections would have to be altered to modify the instrument to a reposable forceps.

Turning now to FIGS. **21-22**, another embodiment of an endoscopic vessel sealing forceps **3010** is shown for use with various surgical procedures and generally includes a housing **3020**, a handle assembly **3030**, an articulation assembly **3075** composed of two articulators **3080** and **3090**, a trigger assembly **3070** and an end effector assembly **3100** all of which mutually cooperate to articulate, grasp, seal and divide tubular vessels and vascular tissue. Although the majority of the figures relating to this embodiment depict a bipolar sealing forceps **3010** for use in connection with endoscopic surgical procedures, the present disclosure may be used for monopolar surgical procedures which employ a remote patient pad for completing the current loop.

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Forceps **3010** includes a generally flexible shaft **3012** which has a distal end **3016** dimensioned to mechanically engage the end effector assembly **3100** and a proximal end **3014** which mechanically engages a distal portion of the housing **3020**. In one embodiment, the shaft **3012** has at least two portions, a proximal portion **3012a'** and a distal portion **3012b'** (See FIG. **23**). The proximal portion **3012a'** of the shaft **3012** may be formed of a flexible tubing (e.g., plastic) and may incorporate a tube of braided steel to provide axial (e.g., compressional) and rotational strength. The distal portion **3012b'** of shaft **3012** may be also be flexible, but may incorporate one or more moving joints **3012a**, **3012b**. A casing or insulating material **3012b''** may be employed to protect a plurality of internal moving joints **3012a** (See FIGS. **21** and **48**) of the flexible shaft **3012**.

In one embodiment, the proximal portion **3012a'** of the shaft **3012** is flexible and non-articulating while the distal portion **3012b'** of shaft **3012** is capable of articulating in response to movement of articulation cables or wires. Details of how the shaft **3012** flexes are described in more detail below with respect to FIGS. **38** and **40-45**. The proximal end **3014** of shaft **3012** is received within a distal end of the housing **3020** and connected to the articulating assembly **3090** and drive assembly **3024** as explained in further detail below. In the drawings and in the descriptions which follow, the term “proximal,” as is traditional, will refer to the end of the forceps **3010** which is closer to the user, while the term “distal” will refer to the end which is farther from the user.

As best seen in FIG. **21**, forceps **3010** also includes an electrosurgical cable **3820** which connects the forceps **3010** to a source of electrosurgical energy, e.g., a generator (not shown). It is contemplated that generators such as those sold by Covidien—Energy-based Devices, located in Boulder, Colo. may be used as a source of electrosurgical energy, e.g., Covidien’s LIGASURE™ Vessel Sealing Generator and Covidien’s Force Triad™ Generator.

The generator may include various safety and performance features including isolated output, independent activation of accessories and/or so-called “Instant Response™” software which is a proprietary technology owned by Covidien. Instant Response™ is an advanced feedback system which senses changes in tissue 200 times per second and adjusts voltage and current to maintain appropriate power. The Instant Response™ technology is believed to provide one or more of the following benefits to vessel sealing: consistent clinical effect through all tissue types; reduced thermal spread and risk of collateral tissue damage; less need to “turn up the generator”; and designed for the minimally invasive environment.

Cable **3820** is internally divided into numerous leads, e.g., lead **3810**, control leads (not shown) and a ground lead (not shown) which each transmit electrosurgical energy through their respective feed paths **3809** (See FIG. **34**) through the forceps **3010** and a guide path **3850** defined in an end effector support **3400** (See FIG. **29**) for ultimate connection to the end effector assembly **3100** as explained in more detail below with respect to the description of FIG. **25**.

Handle assembly **3030** includes a fixed handle **3050** and a movable handle **3040**. Fixed handle **3050** is integrally associated with housing **3020** and handle **3040** is movable relative to fixed handle **3050** as explained in more detail below with respect to the operation of the forceps **3010**. Articulation assembly **3075** sits atop housing **3020** and is operable via articulation wheels **3080** and **3090** to move the end effector assembly **3100** (and the flexible distal portion **3012b'** of the shaft **3012**) in the direction of arrows “U”, “D” and “R”, “L” relative to axis longitudinal A-A as explained in more detail

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below. Wheels **3080** and **3090** may be provided in alternative arrangements such as disposed on the side of the housing **3020**. Also, wheels **3080** and **3090** may be replaced by other mechanisms to articulate the jaw members **3110** and **3120** such as levers, trackballs, joysticks, or the like. Details relating to the articulation assembly **3075** are explained in more detail below with reference to FIGS. **24A-24C**, **35**, **36**, **38** and **40-45**.

As mentioned above, end effector assembly **3100** is supported by an end effector support **3400** attached at the distal end **3016** of shaft **3012** and the end effector assembly **3100** includes a pair of opposing jaw members **3110** and **3120**. Movable handle **3040** of handle assembly **3030** is ultimately connected to a drive assembly **3024** which, together, mechanically cooperate to impart movement of the jaw members **3110** and **3120** from an open position wherein the jaw members **3110** and **3120** are disposed in spaced relation relative to one another (See FIGS. **44**, **47-52**), to a clamping or closed position wherein the jaw members **3110** and **3120** cooperate to grasp tissue therebetween.

As shown best in FIG. **23**, housing **3020** encloses a drive assembly **3024** which cooperates with the movable handle **3040** to impart movement of the jaw members **3110** and **3120** from the open position to the clamping or closed position. The handle assembly **3030** can generally be characterized as a four-bar mechanical linkage composed of the following elements: movable handle **3040**, a link **3065**, a cam-like link **3036** and a base link embodied by fixed handle **3050** and a pair of pivot points **3037** and **3067b**. Movement of the handle **3040** activates the four-bar linkage which, in turn, actuates the drive assembly **3024** for imparting movement of the opposing jaw members **3110** and **3120** relative to one another to grasp tissue therebetween.

It is envisioned that employing a four-bar mechanical linkage will enable the user to gain a significant mechanical advantage when compressing the jaw members **3110** and **3120** against the tissue as explained in further detail below with respect the operating parameters of the drive assembly **3024**. Although shown as a four-bar mechanical linkage, the present disclosure contemplates other linkages to effect relative motion of the jaw members **3110** and **3120** as is known in the art.

Fixed handle **3050** includes a channel **3054** defined therein that is dimensioned to receive a flange **3092** which extends proximally from movable handle **3040** (See FIG. **23**). Flange **3092** includes a fixed end **3090** that is affixed to movable handle **3040** and a t-shaped free end **3093** which is dimensioned for facile reception within channel **3054** of handle **3050**. It is envisioned that flange **3092** may be dimensioned to allow a user to selectively, progressively and/or incrementally move jaw members **3110** and **3120** relative to one another from the open to closed positions. For example, it is also contemplated that flange **3092** may include a ratchet-like interface which lockingly engages the movable handle **3040** and, therefore, jaw members **3110** and **3120** at selective, incremental positions relative to one another depending upon a particular purpose (not shown). Other mechanisms may also be employed to control and/or limit the movement of handle **3040** relative to handle **3050** (and jaw members **3110** and **3120**) such as, e.g., hydraulic, semi-hydraulic, linear actuator(s), gas-assisted mechanisms and/or gearing systems.

As best illustrated in FIGS. **21** and **23**, the housing **3020** includes two halves **3020a** and **3020b** which include a plurality of interfaces disposed at various points around the periphery of housing halves **3020a** and **3020b** for ultrasonic welding purposes, e.g., energy direction/deflection points. It is also contemplated that housing halves **3020a** and **3020b** (as

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well as the other components described below) may be assembled together in any fashion known in the art. For example, alignment pins, snap-like interfaces, tongue and groove interfaces, locking tabs, adhesive ports, etc. may all be utilized either alone or in combination for assembly purposes.

Housing halves **3020a** and **3020b**, when assembled, form an internal cavity **3052** that predefines the channel **3054** within fixed handle **3050** such that an entrance pathway **3053** and an exit pathway **3058** are formed for reciprocation of the t-shaped flange end **3093** therein. Once assembled, a generally triangular-shaped member **3057a** defines a rail or track **3059** for movement of the flange **3092** therealong. During movement of the flange **3092** along the entrance and exit pathways **3053** and **3058**, respectively, the t-shaped end **3093** rides along track **3059** adjacent triangular member **3057a** according to the particular dimensions of the triangularly-shaped member **3057a**, which, as can be appreciated, pre-determines part of the overall pivoting motion of handle **3040** relative to fixed handle **3050**.

Once actuated, handle **3040** moves in a generally arcuate or curved fashion towards fixed handle **3050** about pivot **3069** which causes link **3065** to rotate proximally about pivots **3067a** and **3067b** which, in turn, cause cam-like link **3036** to rotate about pivots **3037** and **3069** in a generally proximal direction. Movement of the cam-like link **3036** imparts movement to the drive assembly **3024** as explained in more detail below. Moreover, proximal rotation of the link **3065** about pivots **3067a** and **3067b** also causes a distal end **3063** of link **3065** to release, i.e., “unlock”, the trigger assembly **3070** for selective actuation. This feature is explained in detail with reference to FIGS. **31** and **53-54** and the operation of the knife assembly **3500**.

As shown best in FIGS. **25-31**, the end effector assembly **3100** includes opposing jaw members **3110** and **3120** which cooperate to effectively grasp tissue for sealing purposes. The end effector assembly **3100** is designed as a unilateral assembly, i.e., jaw member **3120** is fixed relative to the shaft **3012** and jaw member **3110** pivots about a pivot pin **3103** to grasp tissue.

More particularly, the unilateral end effector assembly **3100** includes one stationary or fixed jaw member **3120** mounted in fixed relation to the shaft **3012** and pivoting jaw member **3110** mounted about a pivot pin **3103** attached to the stationary jaw member **3120**. A reciprocating sleeve **3130** is slidably disposed within the shaft **3012** and is remotely operable by the drive assembly **3024**. The pivoting jaw member **3110** includes a detent or protrusion **3137** which extends from jaw member **3110** through an aperture **3135** disposed within the reciprocating sleeve **3130** (FIG. **25**). The pivoting jaw member **3110** is actuated by sliding the sleeve **3130** axially within the shaft **3012** such that a distal end of the aperture **3135** abuts against the detent **3137** on the pivoting jaw member **3110** (See FIGS. **29** and **56**). Pulling the sleeve **3130** proximally closes the jaw members **3110** and **3120** about tissue grasped therebetween and pushing the sleeve **3130** distally opens the jaw members **3110** and **3120** for grasping purposes.

As best illustrated in FIGS. **25** and **26**, knife channels **3115a** and **3115b** run through the center of the jaw members **3110** and **3120**, respectively, such that a blade **3510** from the knife assembly **3500** can cut the tissue grasped between the jaw members **3110** and **3120** when the jaw members **3110** and **3120** are in a closed position. More particularly, the blade **3510** can only be advanced through the tissue when the jaw members **3110** and **3120** are closed thus preventing accidental or premature activation of the blade **3510** through the tissue. Put simply, the knife channels **3115a** and **3115b** are

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blocked when the jaws members **3110** and **3120** are opened and aligned for distal activation when the jaw members **3110** and **3120** are closed (See FIGS. **49** and **56**). Electrical energy flows through steering cable **3902** (soldered to sleeve **3130**) then through sleeve **3130** to jaw **3120** (sleeve **3130** is welded or soldered to jaw **3120**).

As best shown in FIG. **25**, jaw member **3110** also includes a jaw housing **3116** which has an insulative substrate or insulator **3114** and an electrically conductive surface **3112**. Housing **3116** and insulator **3114** are dimensioned to securely engage the electrically conductive sealing surface **3112**. This may be accomplished by stamping, by overmolding, by overmolding a stamped electrically conductive sealing plate and/or by overmolding a metal injection molded seal plate. For example, the electrically conductive sealing plate **3112** may include a series of upwardly extending flanges that are designed to matingly engage the insulator **3114**. The insulator **3114** includes a shoe-like interface **3107** disposed at a distal end thereof which is dimensioned to engage the outer periphery of the housing **3116** in a slip-fit manner. The shoe-like interface **3107** may also be overmolded about the outer periphery of the jaw **3110** during a manufacturing step. It is envisioned that lead **3810** terminates within the shoe-like interface **3107** at the point where lead **3810** electrically connects to the seal plate **3112** (not shown). The movable jaw member **3110** also includes a wire channel (not shown) that is designed to guide cable lead **3810** into electrical continuity with sealing plate **3112**.

All of these manufacturing techniques produce jaw member **3110** having an electrically conductive surface **3112** which is substantially surrounded by an insulating substrate **3114** and housing **3116**. The insulator **3114**, electrically conductive sealing surface **3112** and the outer, jaw housing **3116** are dimensioned to limit and/or reduce many of the known undesirable effects related to tissue sealing, e.g., flashover, thermal spread and stray current dissipation. Alternatively, it is also envisioned that jaw members **3110** and **3120** may be manufactured from a ceramic-like material and the electrically conductive surface(s) **3112** are coated onto the ceramic-like jaw members **3110** and **3120**.

Jaw member **3110** also includes a pivot flange **3118** which includes protrusion **3137**. Protrusion **3137** extends from pivot flange **3118** and includes an arcuately-shaped inner surface dimensioned to matingly engage the aperture **3135** of sleeve **3130** upon retraction thereof. Pivot flange **3118** also includes a pin slot **3119** that is dimensioned to engage pivot pin **3103** to allow jaw member **3110** to rotate relative to jaw member **3120** upon retraction of the reciprocating sleeve **3130**. As explained in more detail below, pivot pin **3103** also mounts to the stationary jaw member **3120** through a pair of apertures **3101a** and **3101b** disposed within a proximal portion of the jaw member **3120**.

It is envisioned that the electrically conductive sealing surface **3112** may also include an outer peripheral edge which has a pre-defined radius and the insulator **3114** meets the electrically conductive sealing surface **3112** along an adjoining edge of the sealing surface **3112** in a generally tangential position. At the interface, the electrically conductive surface **3112** is raised relative to the insulator **3114**. Moreover, the electrically conductive surface **3112** and the insulator **3114**, when assembled, form longitudinally-oriented knife slot **3115a** defined therethrough for reciprocation of the knife blade **3510**. It is envisioned that the knife channel **3115a** cooperates with corresponding knife channel **3115b** defined in stationary jaw member **3120** to facilitate longitudinal

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extension of the knife blade **3510** along a preferred cutting plane to effectively and accurately separate the tissue along a formed tissue seal.

Jaw member **3120** includes similar elements to jaw member **3110** such as jaw housing **3126** and an electrically conductive sealing surface **3122**. Likewise, the electrically conductive surface **3122** and the insulative housing **3126**, when assembled, include a longitudinally-oriented channel **3115a** defined therethrough for reciprocation of the knife blade **3510**. As mentioned above, when the jaw members **3110** and **3120** are closed about tissue, knife channels **3115a** and **3115b** allow longitudinal extension of the knife **3510** in a distal fashion to sever tissue along the tissue seal. It is also envisioned that the knife channel, e.g., knife channel **3115b**, may be completely disposed in jaw member, e.g., jaw member **3120**, depending upon a particular purpose.

As best seen in FIG. **26**, jaw member **3120** includes a series of stop members **3150** disposed on the inner facing surfaces of the electrically conductive sealing surface **3122** to facilitate gripping and manipulation of tissue and to define a gap "G" of about 0.001 inches to about 0.006 inches between opposing jaw members **3110** and **3120** during sealing and cutting of tissue. It is envisioned that the series of stop members **3150** may be employed on one or both jaw members **3110** and **3120** depending upon a particular purpose or to achieve a desired result. A detailed discussion of these and other envisioned stop members **3150** as well as various manufacturing and assembling processes for attaching and/or affixing the stop members **3150** to the electrically conductive sealing surfaces **3112**, **3122** are described in commonly-assigned, co-pending U.S. Application Serial No. PCT/US01/11413 entitled "VESSEL SEALER AND DIVIDER WITH NON-CONDUCTIVE STOP MEMBERS" by Dycus et al. which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety herein.

Jaw member **3120** is designed to be fixed to the end of a tube **3438** which is part of the distal articulating portion **3012b'** of the shaft **3012** such that articulation of the distal portion **3012b'** of the shaft **3012** will articulate the end effector assembly **3100**. Jaw member **3120** includes a rear C-shaped cuff **3170** having a slot **3177** defined therein that is dimensioned to receive a slide pin **3171** disposed on an inner periphery of tube **3438**. More particularly, slide pin **3171** extends substantially the length tube **3438** to slide into engagement (e.g., friction-fit, glued, welded, etc) within slot **3177**. C-shaped cuff **3170** inwardly compresses to assure friction-fit engagement when received within tube **3438**. Tube **3438** also includes an inner cavity defined therethrough that reciprocates the knife assembly **3500** upon distal activation thereof.

As explained in more detail below, fixed jaw member **3120** is connected to a second electrical potential through tube end effector support **3400** which is connects to steering cable **3902**. More particularly, fixed jaw **3120** connects to the end effector support **3400** through a ground path connection from one or more steering cables, e.g., steering cable **3902**, that includes a fuse clip, spring clip or other electro-mechanical connection at a proximal end thereof to provide electrical from the electrosurgical generator (not shown). Lead **3810** is carried through a channel defined within shaft **3012** (as explained in more detail below with respect to FIG. **32**) and carries a first electrical potential to movable jaw **3110**.

As mentioned above, the jaw members **3110** and **3120** may be opened, closed, articulated (and in some embodiments rotated) to manipulate and grasp tissue until sealing is desired. This enables the user to position and re-position the forceps **3010** prior to activation and sealing. As illustrated in

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FIGS. 21 and 23, the end effector assembly 3100 is articulatable about longitudinal axis "A-A" through rotation of wheels 3080 and 3090 of articulation assembly 3075 in either direction in the direction of arrows "R, L" and "U, D" (right, left and up, down, respectively) as explained in more detail below.

Once the tissue is grasped (within the required pressure range of about 3 kg/cm² to about 16 kg/cm²), the user then selectively applies electrosurgical energy to effectively seal tissue. Once sealed, the user then selectively advances the knife 3510 by actuating the trigger assembly 3070 to cut the tissue along the tissue seal. Actuation of the trigger assembly 3070 causes a cable 3504 extending through shaft 3012 and operatively coupled to a knife carrier 3505 for supporting the knife 3510 to move distally to thereby cut tissue along the tissue seal (See FIGS. 53 and 54). The operating features and relative movements of one envisioned trigger assembly 3070 are summarized below and more thoroughly described in the above-mentioned commonly-owned U.S. Pat. No. 7,156,846.

Drive assembly 3024 is positioned within the housing 3020 between housing halves 3020a and 3020b. Drive assembly 3024 includes a drive rod 3032 and a compression mechanism 3021. Over-tube 3807b prevents drive rod 3032 from buckling along un-guided length (See FIG. 46). Compression mechanism 3021 includes a compression sleeve 3027 which is coupled to a spring mount 3026. The distal end 3028 of the compression sleeve 3027 is dimensioned to engage the nut 3178 disposed at the proximal end of drive rod 3032 such that longitudinal movement of the compression sleeve 3027 actuates the drive rod 3032. The proximal end of the compression sleeve 3027 is dimensioned to engage a barbell-shaped compression tab 3025 that is disposed within a longitudinal slot 3025s of the spring mount 3026. The compression sleeve 3027 also includes a longitudinal slot or channel 3025c which is longitudinally aligned with slot 3025s and is dimensioned to receive the cam piston 3038 of the cam link 3036 described above.

The proximal end of spring mount 3026 includes a circular flange ring 3023 that is dimensioned to bias the compression spring 3022 once the compression mechanism 3021 is assembled and seated within housing 3020. The distal end of spring mount 3026 includes a flange 3025f which restricts distal movement of the tab 3025 to within the slot 3025s of the spring mount 3026 and biases the opposite end of the spring 3022.

As best seen in FIGS. 51-54, once assembled, spring 3022 is poised for compression atop spring mount 3026 upon actuation of the handle assembly 3030. More particularly, movement of the cam piston 3038 within slot 3025c (via movement of handle assembly 3030) moves the tab 3025 atop slot 3025s and reciprocates the compression sleeve 3027 within the spring mount 3026 to compress the spring 3022. Proximal movement of the compression sleeve 3027 imparts proximal movement to the drive rod 3032 which closes jaw members 3110 and 3120 about tissue. Release of the handle 3030 (as explained in more detail below), unbiases the spring 3022 to facilitate re-opening of the jaw members 3110 and 3120 relative to one another.

The trigger assembly 3070 which activates the knife assembly 3500 as described below with respect to FIGS. 53 and 54 includes an actuator 3073 having a cuff-like distal end 3078 that is dimensioned to receive the proximal rim of drive adapter 3180. A drive pin 3074 extends laterally from the proximal end of actuator 3073. As best shown in FIG. 23, the compression sleeve 3027 is dimensioned to slide internally within an actuator 3073 when the forceps 3010 is assembled. Likewise, the actuator 3073, when activated, can slide distally along the outer periphery of compression sleeve 3027 to

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actuate the knife assembly 3500 as described below with respect to FIGS. 23 and 54. The drive pin 3074 is dimensioned to ride along a pair of guide rails 3071a and 3071b disposed within a bifurcated tail portion of finger tab 3072 which includes ends 3076a and 3076b, respectively. The opposing ends of drive pin 3074 are also engaged in corresponding slots 3029a defined in each housing half, e.g., housing half 3020a (See FIG. 23).

A hinge or pivot pin 3077 mounts the finger tab 3072 between housing halves 3020a and 3020b. A torsion spring 3075 is incorporated within the trigger assembly 3070 to facilitate progressive and consistent longitudinal reciprocation of the actuator 3073 and knife rod 3032 to assure reliable separation along the tissue seal. In other words, the trigger assembly 3070 is configured in a proximal, "pre-loaded" configuration prior to activation. This assures accurate and intentional reciprocation of the knife assembly 3200. Moreover, it is envisioned that the "pre-load" configuration of the torsion spring 3075 acts as an automatic recoil of the knife assembly 3500 to permit repeated reciprocation through the tissue as needed. A plurality of gripping elements 3071 is preferably incorporated atop the finger tab 3072 to enhance gripping of the finger tab 3072.

The trigger assembly 3070 is initially prevented from firing due to the unique configuration of the distal end 3063 of the link 3065 which abuts against the finger tab 3072 and passively "locks" the trigger assembly 3070 prior to actuation of the handle assembly 3030. Moreover, it is envisioned that the opposing jaw members 3110 and 3120 may be articulated and partially opened and closed without unlocking the trigger assembly 3070 which, as can be appreciated, allows the user to grip and manipulate the tissue without premature activation of the knife assembly 3500. As mentioned below, only when the t-shaped end 3093 of flange 3092 is completely reciprocated within channel 3054 and seated within a pre-defined catch basin 3062 (explained below) will the distal end 3063 of link 3065 move into a position which will allow activation of the trigger assembly 3070. The operating features and relative movements of these internal working components of the forceps 3010 are shown by phantom representation and directional arrows and are best illustrated in FIG. 55.

The operating features and relative movements of the internal working components of the forceps 3010 are shown by phantom representation in the various figures. As mentioned above, when the forceps 3010 is assembled a predefined channel 3052 is formed within the fixed handle 3050. The channel includes entrance pathway 3053 and an exit pathway 3058 for reciprocation of the flange 3092 and the t-shaped end 3093 therein. Once assembled, the two generally triangular-shaped members 3057a are positioned in close abutment relative to one another and define track 3192 disposed therebetween.

As the handle 3040 is squeezed and flange 3092 is incorporated into channel 3054 of fixed handle 3050, the driving assembly 3024, through the mechanical advantage of the four bar linkage, biases tab 3025 to compress spring 3022 against a rear flange ring 3023. As a result thereof, nut sleeve 3178 pulls the drive rod 3032 proximally which, in turn, closes jaw member 3110 onto jaw member 3120. It is envisioned that the utilization of a four-bar, cam-like pivot 3036 and drive assembly 3024 allows the user to selectively compress the coil spring 3022 a specific distance which, in turn, imparts a specific pulling load on the drive rod 3032 which is converted to a rotational torque about the jaw pivot pin 3103. As a result, a specific closure force can be transmitted to the opposing jaw members 3110 and 3120.

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FIG. 51 shows the initial actuation of handle 3040 towards fixed handle 3050 which causes the free end 3093 of flange 3092 to move generally proximally and upwardly along entrance pathway 3053. During movement of the flange 3092 along the entrance and exit pathways 3053 and 3058, respectively, the t-shaped end 3093 rides along track 3059 between the two triangular members 3057a. Once the desired position for the sealing site is determined and the jaw members 3110 and 3120 are properly positioned, handle 3040 may be compressed fully such that the t-shaped end 3093 of flange 3092 clears a predefined rail edge 3193 located atop the triangular-shaped members 3057a. Once end 3093 clears edge 3193, releasing movement of the handle 3040 and flange 3092 is redirected into a catch basin 3194 located at the proximal end of the triangular member 3057a. More particularly, upon a slight reduction in the closing pressure of handle 3040 against handle 3050, the handle 3040 returns slightly distally towards entrance pathway 3051 but flange 3092 redirected towards exit pathway 3058. At this point, the release or return pressure between the handles 3040 and 3050, which is attributable and directly proportional to the release pressure associated with the compression of the drive assembly 3024, causes the end 3093 of flange 3092 to settle or lock within catch basin 3194. Handle 3040 is now secured in position within fixed handle 3050 which, in turn, locks the jaw members 3110 and 3120 in a closed position against the tissue.

Re-initiation or re-grasping of the handle 3040 again moves t-shaped end 3093 of flange 3092 generally proximally along exit pathway 3058 until end 3093 clears a lip 3196 disposed atop triangular-shaped members 3057a along exit pathway 3058. Once lip 3196 is sufficiently cleared, handle 3040 and flange 3092 are fully and freely releasable from handle 3050 along exit pathway 3058 upon the reduction of grasping/gripping pressure which, in turn, returns the jaw members 3110 and 3120 to the open, pre-activated position.

As mentioned above, the jaw members 3110 and 3120 may be opened, closed and articulated to manipulate tissue until sealing is desired. This enables the user to position and reposition the forceps 3010 prior to activation and sealing. As illustrated in FIG. 23, the end effector assembly 100 is articulatable about longitudinal axis "A-A" through rotation of the rotating wheels 3080 and 3090. The unique feed path of the cable lead 3810 through the housing, along shaft 3012 and, ultimately, to the jaw member 3110 enables the user to articulate the end effector assembly 3100 in multiple directions without tangling or causing undue strain on cable lead 3810.

Again as best shown in FIG. 53, trigger assembly 3070 mounts atop movable handle 3040 and cooperates with the knife assembly 3500 to selectively translate knife 3510 through a tissue seal. More particularly, the trigger assembly 3070 includes a finger actuator 3072 and a U-shaped upwardly-extending flange 3076 having legs 3076a and 3076b. A pivot pin 3077 mounts the trigger assembly 3070 between housing halves 3020a and 3020b for selective rotation thereof. Legs 3076a and 3076b of the U-shaped flange 3076 each include a respective rails 3071a and 3071b defined therein which are each dimensioned to receive a free end of the respective drive pin 3074. The compression sleeve 3027 is dimensioned to slide internally within actuator 3073 when the forceps 3010 is assembled. Likewise, the actuator 3073, when activated, can slide distally along the outer periphery of compression sleeve 3027 to actuate the knife assembly 3500. The drive pin 3074 (or opposing pins (not shown)) is dimensioned to ride along a pair of guide rails 3071a and 3071b disposed within the u-shaped bifurcated tail portion of finger tab 3072 which includes ends 3076a and 3076b, respectively.

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Proximal activation of the finger tab 3072 rotates the trigger assembly 3070 about pivot pin 3077 which, in turn, forces the actuator 3073 distally, which, as explained in more detail below, ultimately extends the knife 3510 through the tissue.

5 Torsion spring 3075 biases the trigger assembly 3070 in a retracted position such that after severing tissue the knife 3510 and the trigger assembly 3070 are automatically returned to a pre-firing position.

As best shown in the internal view of the FIG. 34, the electrical leads 3810 and control leads (not shown) are fed through the housing 3020 from electrosurgical cable 820. More particularly, the electrosurgical cable 3820 is fed into the bottom of the housing 3020 through fixed handle 3050. A ground lead (not shown) extends directly from cable 3820 and connects (via a fused clip or spring clip or the like) to steering cable 3902 to conduct the second electrical potential to fixed jaw member 3120. Control leads (not shown) extend from cable 3820 and connect to the hand switch or joy-stick-like toggle switch 3800. Lead 3810 extends from hand switch 3800 to jaw member 3110 as explained above.

Switch 3800 includes an ergonomically dimensioned switch plate 3805 which conforms to the outer shape of housing 3020 (once assembled). Switch 3800 may include a hermetically-sealed bushing 3803 that is operably disposed through switch plate 3805 and which protects electrical switch 3802 from fluids. Electrical switch 3802 is positioned atop and electrically coupled to a printed circuit board 3804 that regulates and controls the flow of electrosurgical energy to the jaw members 3110 and 3120 upon activation of switch 3804.

When switch 3800 is depressed, trigger lead 3810 carries the first electrical potential to jaw member 3110 thus activating a bipolar circuit. More particularly, when switch 3800 is depressed and the PC board 3804 is activated, the generator recognizes a voltage drop across control leads (not shown) from cable 3820 which initiates activation of the generator to supply a first electrical potential to jaw member 3110 and a second electrical potential to jaw member 3120. Switch 3800 acts as a control circuit and is protected or removed from the actual current loop which supplies electrical energy to the jaw members 3110 and 3120. This reduces the chances of electrical failure of the switch 3800 due to high current loads during activation. A footswitch (not shown) which may also be utilized with the forceps 3010, also operates in a similar manner, i.e., upon activation of the footswitch, the generator recognizes a voltage drop across the input and output leads of the footswitch which, in turn, signals the generator to initiate electrosurgical activation of the jaw members 3110 and 3120.

A safety switch or circuit (not shown) may be employed with the printed circuit board such that the switch cannot fire unless the jaw members 3110 and 3120 are closed and/or unless the jaw members 3110 and 3120 have tissue held therebetween. In the latter instance, a sensor (not shown) may be employed to determine if tissue is held therebetween. In addition, other sensor mechanisms may be employed which determine pre-surgical, concurrent surgical (i.e., during surgery) and/or post surgical conditions. The sensor mechanisms may also be utilized with a closed-loop feedback system coupled to the electrosurgical generator to regulate the electrosurgical energy based upon one or more pre-surgical, concurrent surgical or post surgical conditions. Various sensor mechanisms and feedback systems are described in commonly-owned, co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/427,832 entitled "METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR CONTROLLING OUTPUT OF RF MEDICAL GENERATOR" filed on May 1, 2003 the entire contents of which are incorporated by reference hereinabove.

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It is contemplated that utilizing a cable feed path **3809** (See FIG. **34**) for cable lead **3810** and by utilizing steering cable **3902** to carry the first and second electrical potentials, respectively, not only electrically isolates each jaw member **3110** and **3120** but also allows the jaw members **3110** and **3120** to pivot about pivot pin **3103** without unduly straining or possibly tangling cable lead **3810**. Moreover, it is envisioned that the simplicity of the electrical connections greatly facilitates the manufacturing and assembly process and assures a consistent and tight electrical connection for the transfer of energy through the tissue.

FIGS. **24A** and **24C** show exploded views of the two articulation assemblies **3080** and **3090** that allow selective articulation of the end effector assembly **3100** to facilitate the manipulation and grasping of tissue in tight surgical cavities. More particularly, the two rotating assemblies **3080** and **3090** include selectively rotatable wheels, **3081** and **3091**, respectively, that sit atop the housing **3020**. Each wheel, e.g., wheel **3081**, is independently moveable relative to the other wheel, e.g., **3091**, and allows a user to selectively articulate the end effector assembly **3100** along a given axis of articulation relative to the longitudinal axis "A-A." For example and as explained in more detail below, rotation of wheel **3091** articulates the end effector assembly **3100** along arrows R, L (or right-to-left articulation) and rotation of wheel **3081** articulates the end effector assembly along arrows U, D (or up and down articulation) (See FIGS. **21** and **38-45**).

Turning in detail to the exploded views of FIGS. **24A** and **24C**, articulation assembly **3080** operably couples to an articulation block **3250** that mounts within housing **3020**. More particularly, an elongated hollow spindle **3084** mechanically interfaces at one end with the articulation wheel **3081** (set screw or friction-fit manner) such that rotation of the wheel **3081**, in turn, rotates the spindle **3084**. The opposite end of the spindle **3084** mechanically interfaces with a rotation link **3086**. The link **3086** rotates in reference to the articulation block **3250**. The link plate **3082** prevents link **3086** from sliding out of a receiving hole defined in the articulation block **3250** and the link **3082** is attached to the block by bolts or other mechanical connections.

Link **3086**, in turn, mounts to the articulation block **3250** such that each end **3086a** and **3086b** couples to a respective slider **3255a** and **3255b** (See FIGS. **24B** and **24C**) that each ride along a series of predefined rails **3254a** and **3254b** disposed in the articulation block **3250**. The sliders **3255a** and **3255b** each couple to an end of a respective steering cable **3901** and **3902** (See FIG. **24C**) via a series of tensioning bolts **3256a-3256b**, sleeves **3253a-3253b**, washers **3258a-3258b**, elastic compression bushings or springs **3259a-3259b** and tensioning bolts **3257a-3257b** such that rotation of the wheel **3081** in a given direction causes the respective sliders **3255a** and **3255b** to slide oppositely relative to one another within rails **3254a** and **3254b** to pull or contract a respective steering cable **3901-3902**. For example, rotation of wheel **3081** in a clockwise direction (DOWN "D"), causes the rotational link **3086** to rotate clockwise which, in turn, causes end **3086a** to rotate distally and end **3086b** to rotate proximally. Tensioning bolts **3257a-3257b** and bushings **3259a-3259b** are designed to maintain the tension of the cables **3901-3902** within the respective sliders **3255a** and **3255b**.

As a result thereof, slider **3255a** moves distally and slider **3255b** moves proximally causing steering cable **3901** to move distally and steering cable **3902** to move proximally thus causing end effector assembly to flex DOWN "D". When wheel **3081** is rotated counter-clockwise, the sliders **3255a** and **3255b** move in an opposite direction on rails **3254a** and **3254b** and end effector assembly **3100** has an opposite effect,

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i.e., the end effector assembly **3100** is articulated in an UP "U" direction (See FIG. **45**). Rotational movement of wheel **3081** moves the end effector along an UP "U" and DOWN "D" plane relative to the longitudinal axis "A-A" (See FIG. **21**). The cam-like connection between the sliders **3255a** and **3255b** and the link **3086** offers increased mechanical advantage when a user increases the articulation angle, i.e., the cam-like connection helps overcome the increasing resistance to articulation as the flexible shaft **3012b'** is articulated in a given direction.

Wheel assembly **3090** attaches to articulation block **3250** in a similar manner. More particularly, wheel **3091** operably engages to one end of a solid spindle **3094** which, in turn, attaches at an opposite end thereof to rotational link **3096** disposed on an opposite end of the articulation block **3250**. Spindle **3094** is dimensioned for insertion through elongated spindle sleeve **3084** in a manner that spindle **3094** is rotatable relative to spindle sleeve **3084**. Shaft **3094** passes through the spindle sleeve **3084** and engages a locking nut **3099**, which is, in turn, welded to rotational link **3096**. To accomplish this purpose, spindle sleeve **3084** includes an outer-shaped periphery, rotational link **3096** includes a locking recess **3096'** engraved therein and the locking nut **3099** is utilized to seat within link **3096** and lock spindle **3094** relative to spindle sleeve **3084** such that rotational movement of spindle **3094** does not cause rotation of spindle sleeve **3084**. Indexing wheels **3087** and **3097** are utilized on either side of the articulation block **3250** to assure secure engagement of the spindles **3084** and **3094** therein and to provide notches that interact with the slides **3265a-3265d** to index the wheels **3081** and **3091** for proper fine positioning and secure indexing thereof. The slides **3265a-3265d** are tensioned via respective tensioning screws **3263a-3263d** and springs **3262a-3262d**. The largest notch on the indexing wheels **3087**, **3097** is designed to indicate a so-called "home" orientation for a respective articulation wheel **3081**, **3091**. As the spindles **3084** and **3094** are rotated, the indexing wheels **3087** and **3097** act like miniature ratchet mechanisms to enhance fine discreet adjustment of each articulation wheel **3081** and **3091** relative to the longitudinal axis.

As mentioned above, spindle **3094** connects at an opposite end thereof to rotational link **3096**. A link plate **3092** is utilized to secure the link to the opposite side of the articulation block **3250**. Much like link **3086**, link **3096** operably couples to a pair of sliders **3255c** and **3255d** which are configured to ride in rails **3254c** and **3254d** defined on the opposite side of the articulation block **3250**. More particularly, each end **3096a** and **3096b** of link **3096** couples to a respective slider **3255c** and **3255d** (See FIGS. **24B** and **24C**) that each ride along rails **3254c** and **3254d** disposed in the articulation block **3250**. The sliders **3255c** and **3255d** each couple to an end of a respective steering cable **3903** and **3904** via a series of tensioning bolts **3256c-3256d**, sleeves **3253c-3253d**, washers **3258c-3258d**, elastic compression bushings or springs **3259c-3259d** and tensioning bolts **3257c-3257d** such that rotation of the wheel **3091** in a given direction causes the respective sliders **3255c** and **3255d** to slide oppositely relative to one another within rails **3254c** and **3254d** to pull or contract a respective steering cables **3903-3904**. For example, rotation of wheel **3091** in a clockwise direction (RIGHT "R"), causes the rotational link **3086** to rotate clockwise which, in turn, causes end **3096a** to rotate distally and end **3096b** to rotate proximally (See FIGS. **40-42**). As a result thereof, slider **3255c** moves distally and slider **3255d** moves proximally causing steering cable **3903** to move distally and steering cable **3904** to move proximally thus causing end effector assembly **3100** to flex to the RIGHT "R". When

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wheel **3091** is rotated counter-clockwise, the sliders **3255c** and **3255d** move in an opposite direction on rails **3254c** and **3254d** and end effector assembly **3100** has an opposite effect, i.e., the end effector assembly **3100** is articulated in a LEFT “L” direction (See FIG. 41). Rotational movement of wheel **3091** moves the end effector along an RIGHT and LEFT plane relative to the longitudinal axis “A-A.”

As can be appreciated, the articulation assembly **3075** enables a user to selectively articulate the distal end of the forceps **3010** (i.e., the end effector assembly **3100**) as needed during surgery providing greater flexibility and enhanced maneuverability to the forceps **3010** especially in tight surgical cavities. By virtue of the unique arrangement of the four (4) spring loaded steering cables **3901-3904**, each articulating assembly **3080** and **3090** provides a positive drive, back and forth motion to the end effector assembly **3100** that allows the end effector assembly **3100** to remain in an articulated configuration under strain or stress as the forceps **3010** is utilized and/or prevent buckling through a range of motion. Various mechanical elements (not shown) may be utilized to enhance this purpose including guide paths **3809** through the housing **3020** (See FIG. 34), friction fits sleeves that prevent buckling **3807a**, **3807b** (See FIG. 34), ratchet like interfaces **3087**, **3097** (See FIG. 24A) and tensioning/locking mechanisms or pins **3265c** (See FIG. 24A). In addition, the flexible shaft **3012** and end effector assembly **3100** may also be manipulated to allow multi-directional articulation through the manipulation of both wheels **3081** and **3091** simultaneously or sequentially thereby providing more maneuverability to the forceps.

Turning now to the flexible shaft and with particular respect to FIGS. 25, 28-32, 37, 41 and 45, the forceps **3010** includes a plurality of joints **3012a** and **3012b** that are nestingly arranged in alternating series to form flexible shaft **3012**. The distal end **3016** of shaft **3012** mechanically engages the end effector assembly **3100** and the proximal end **3014** of the shaft **3012** mechanically engages the housing **3020**. As best shown in FIG. 37, there are two sets of joints that are nestingly arranged in alternating series, namely, joints **3012a** and **3012b**. Both joints **3012a** and **3012b** are similar in construction but are offset relative to one another by ninety degrees (90°) to facilitate and enhance relative movement between joints **3012a** and **3012b**. Joint **3012a** includes a pair of distal knuckles **3013a1** and **3013a2** and pair of opposing proximal devises **3011a1** and **3011a2** formed therewith. Joint **3012b** includes a pair of distal knuckles **3013b1** and **3013b2** and pair of opposing proximal devises **3011b1** and **3011b2** formed therewith. Each knuckle **3013a1**, **3013a2** operatively engages a corresponding clevis **3011b1**, **3011b2** of an adjacent joint **3012b**. Joint **3012a** also defines a central lumen **3019a** formed therein and a pair of opposed lumen pairs **3017a1** and **3017a2** and **3017b1** and **3017b2** formed on the four sides of central lumen **3019a**. Joint **3012b** likewise defines a central lumen **3019b** formed therein and the pairs of opposed lumens **3017a1**, **3017a2** and **3017b1**, **3017b2** formed on the sides of central lumen **3019a**.

A flexible tubing **3012b'** covers the distal portion of shaft **3012** (See FIG. 21) and the flexible shaft **3012b'** (See FIG. 25). Moreover, the tubing secures the lead **3810** within channel **3850** defined within end effector support **3400** (See FIG. 28). Flexible tubing **3012b'** may also be configured to seal various lubricants within the flexible portion **3012b'** of shaft **3012** and prevent the ingress of body fluids into the forceps **3010** during use.

Steering cables **3901-3904** slideably extend through lumens **3017a1**, **3017a2** and **3017b1**, **3017b2** of joints **3012a** and **3012b**, respectively, and operably couple to an end effec-

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tor support **3400** (See FIG. 25). More particularly, each steering cable **3901-3904** includes a ball-like mechanical interface at a distal end thereof, namely, interfaces **3901a-3904a**, that are configured to securely mate within a corresponding recess defined in the end effector support **3400**. More particularly, interface **3901a** engages recess **3405a** (See FIG. 25), interface **3902a** engages recess **3405c** (See FIG. 27), interface **3903a** engages recess **3405b** (See FIG. 25) and interface **3904a** engages recess **3405d** (See FIG. 45). As explained above, actuation of one or both articulation wheels **3081** and **3091** pull and release a pair of steering cables **3901**, **3902** and **3903**, **3904** to articulate the end effector assembly **3100** as desired. Offsetting the flexible joints **3012a** and **3012b** relative to one another by ninety degrees (90°) allows articulation of the forceps **3100** in two planes.

As best shown in FIG. 25, the steering cables **3901-3904** are fed through the shaft **3012** through a series of passageways defined therein. More particularly, a cross shaped cable guide adapter **3315** and guide adapter liner or washer **3325** initially orient the cables **3901-3904** for passage through an outer tube **3310** at 90° degree angles relative to one another. The adapter **315** helps attach shaft **3012** to the housing **3020**. The liner or washer **3325** is made from a copper material which may ultimately connect to the steering cable **3902** (which acts as a return path) as explained in more detail below.

The tube **3310** includes passageways **3311a-3311d** defined therein to orient the cables **3901-3904**, respectively, for reception into the flexible joints **3012a** and **3012b** for ultimate connection to the end effector support **3400** as described above. A central guide tube **3305** is utilized to orient the drive rod **3032** and the knife rod **3504** through the shaft for ultimate connection to jaw member **3110** and knife assembly **3500** as well as drive cable **3810**. The central guide tube **3305** is dimensioned for reception within tube **3310** as shown in FIG. 25. One or more steering cables, e.g., **3902**, includes a distal portion **3902b** that electrically connects to the end effector support **3400** which, in turn, connects to jaw member **3120** thereby providing a return path (i.e., ground path) through the tissue for electrosurgical energy from jaw member **3110** (See FIGS. 30 and 49). The proximal end of the steering cable **3902** may, in turn, electrically interface with the PC board **3804** through cable “R” (See FIG. 34).

The central extrusion or guide tube **3305** is made from a highly flexible and lubricious material and performs several important functions: tube **3305** guides the drive rod **3032**, the knife rod **3504** and the electrical lead **3810** from the guide adapter **3315**, shaft **3012** and flexible shaft **3012b'** to the end effector support **3400** and knife assembly **3500**; the tube **3305** provides electrical insulation between component parts; the tube **3305** keeps the lead **3810** and rods **3032** and **3504** separated during relative movement thereof; the tube **3305** minimizes friction and clamping force loss; and tube **3305** keeps the lead **3810** and rods **3032** and **3504** close to the central longitudinal axis to minimize stretching during articulation. The tube **3305** (and internal lumens) may be made from or include materials like polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), graphite or other lubricating agents to minimize friction and other common losses associated with relative movement of component parts. Alternatively, a coaxial structure (not shown) may be utilized to guide the drive rod **3032** and knife rod **3504**.

One or more distal guide plates **3430** and an adapter **3435** may also be utilized to further align the drive rod **3032** and knife rod **3504** and facilitate actuation of the jaw members **3110** and **3120** (See FIG. 25). More particularly and as mentioned above, sleeve **3130** engages flange **3137** of jaw mem-

ber 3110 such that axial movement of the sleeve 3130 forces jaw member 3110 to rotate around pivot pin 3103 and clamp tissue. Sleeve 3130 connects to adapter 3435 which secures drive rod 3032 therein via a wire crimp 3440. The drive rod 3032 has a flat 332a at a distal end thereof to reinforce attachment to crimp 3440 (See FIGS. 31 and 50). By actuating handle 3040, the drive rod 3032 retracts sleeve 3130 to close jaw member 3110 about tissue.

FIG. 25 also shows the knife assembly 3500 that supports and allows facile reciprocation of the knife blade 3510 through tissue. More particularly, the knife assembly 3500 is configured to operably couple to the trigger assembly 3070 as described above such that actuation of the trigger 3072 translates the knife blade 3510 through tissue held between the jaw members 3110 and 3120. The knife blade 3510 is supported atop a knife support 3505. The knife rod 3504 feeds through adapter 3435 and operably engages a butt end 3505a of the knife support 3505. By squeezing trigger 3072, the knife rod 3504 is forced distally into the butt end 3505a which, in turn, forces the knife 3510 through tissue held between the jaw members 3110 and 3120. The knife rod 3504 may be made from steel or other hardened substances to enhance the rigidity of the rod along the length thereof.

Once a proper tissue seal is formed, the tissue may be severed along the tissue seal. Again, one or more safety features may be employed to assure that a proper seal has been formed prior to severing tissue. For example, the generator may include a safety lockout which electrically prevents or electro-mechanically prevents actuation of the knife 3510 unless a proper and effective seal has been formed.

It is envisioned that knife blade 3510 may also be coupled to the same or an alternative electrosurgical energy source to facilitate separation of the tissue along the tissue seal. Moreover, it is envisioned that the angle of the knife blade tip may be dimensioned to provide more or less aggressive cutting angles depending upon a particular purpose. For example, the knife blade 3510 may be positioned at an angle which reduces "tissue wisps" associated with cutting. Moreover, the knife blade 3510 may be designed having different blade geometries such as serrated, notched, perforated, hollow, concave, convex etc. depending upon a particular purpose or to achieve a particular result. It is envisioned that the knife 3510 generally cuts in a progressive, uni-directional fashion (i.e., distally).

Various handles and/or handle assemblies may be operatively connected or otherwise associated with end effector assembly 3100 in order to effect operation and movement of the various components thereof, i.e., drive cable 3032 and/or articulation cables 3901-3904. Exemplary handles and/or handle assemblies for use with end effector 3100 are disclosed in U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/849,562 filed on Oct. 5, 2006 entitled "PROGRAMMABLE MECHANISM FOR MULTIPLE FUNCTION FROM A SINGLE SHAFT"; and U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/849,560 filed on Oct. 5, 2006 entitled "FLEXIBLE ARTICULATED ENDOSCOPIC INSTRUMENT"; the entire disclosure of each being incorporated by reference hereinabove.

From the foregoing and with reference to the various figure drawings, those skilled in the art will appreciate that certain modifications can also be made to the present disclosure without departing from the scope of the same. For example, it is contemplated that the forceps 3010 (and/or the electrosurgical generator used in connection with the forceps 3010) may include a sensor or feedback mechanism (not shown) which automatically selects the appropriate amount of electrosurgical energy to effectively seal the particularly-sized

tissue grasped between the jaw members 3110 and 3120. The sensor or feedback mechanism may also measure the impedance across the tissue during sealing and provide an indicator (visual and/or audible) that an effective seal has been created between the jaw members 3110 and 3120. Examples of such sensor systems are described in commonly-owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/427,832 entitled "METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR CONTROLLING OUTPUT OF RF MEDICAL GENERATOR" filed on May 1, 2003 the entire contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference herein.

As mentioned above, at least one jaw member, e.g., 3120, may include a stop member 3150 which limits the movement of the two opposing jaw members 3110 and 3120 relative to one another. In one embodiment, the stop member 3150 extends from the sealing surface 3122 a predetermined distance according to the specific material properties (e.g., compressive strength, thermal expansion, etc.) to yield a consistent and accurate gap distance "G" during sealing. It is envisioned for the gap distance between opposing sealing surfaces 3112 and 3122 during sealing ranges from about 0.001 inches to about 0.006 inches and, more preferably, between about 0.002 and about 0.003 inches. The non-conductive stop members 150 may be molded onto the jaw members 3110 and 3120 (e.g., overmolding, injection molding, etc.), stamped onto the jaw members 3110 and 3120 or deposited (e.g., deposition) onto the jaw members 3110 and 3120. For example, one technique involves thermally spraying a ceramic material onto the surface of the jaw member 3110 and 3120 to form the stop members 3150. Several thermal spraying techniques are contemplated which involve depositing a broad range of heat resistant and insulative materials on various surfaces to create stop members 3150 for controlling the gap distance between electrically conductive surfaces 3112 and 3122.

Hand switch 3800 may include an ergonomically dimensioned toggle plate (not shown) that may conform to the outer shape of housing 3020 (once assembled). It is envisioned that dimensioning the plate in this fashion permits the user to selectively activate the forceps 3010 in a variety of different orientations, i.e., multi-oriented activation. It is also envisioned that a safety switch or circuit (not shown) may be employed such that the switch 3800 cannot fire unless the jaw members 3110 and 3120 are closed and/or unless the jaw members 3110 and 3120 have tissue held therebetween.

In the latter instance, a sensor (not shown) may be employed to determine if tissue is held therebetween. In addition, other sensor mechanisms may be employed which determine pre-surgical, concurrent surgical (i.e., during surgery) and/or post surgical conditions. The sensor mechanisms may also be utilized with a closed-loop feedback system coupled to the electrosurgical generator to regulate the electrosurgical energy based upon one or more pre-surgical, concurrent surgical or post surgical conditions. Above-mentioned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/427,832 describes one such feedback system, the entire contents of which being incorporated by reference hereinabove.

As can be appreciated, locating the switch 3800 on the forceps 3010 has many advantages. For example, the switch 3800 reduces the amount of electrical cable in the operating room and eliminates the possibility of activating the wrong instrument during a surgical procedure due to "line-of-sight" activation. Moreover, it is envisioned that the switch 3800 may be decommissioned during activation of the knife 3185. Decommissioning the switch 3800 when the trigger 3072 is actuated eliminates unintentionally activating the forceps 3010 during the cutting process. It is also envisioned that the

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switch **3800** may be disposed on another part of the forceps **3010**, e.g., the movable handle **3040**, fixed handle **3050**, a side of the housing **3020**, etc.

Another envisioned safety mechanism would be to route cable lead **3810** to energize the one jaw member, e.g., jaw member **3110**, and the other electrical potential may be conducted through drive sleeve **3130** and transferred to the other jaw member **3120** to establish electrical continuity only upon retraction of the drive sleeve **3130**. It is envisioned that this particular envisioned embodiment will provide at least one additional safety feature, i.e., electrical continuity to the jaw members **3110** and **3120** is made only when the jaw members **3110** and **3120** are closed. The drive rod **3032** may also be energized to the second electrical potential and include a similar-type safety mechanism.

In one embodiment, two isolated electrical leads may supply electrical energy to respective jaw members **3110** and **3120**. In this instance it may be desirable to provide additional channels within the shaft **3012** and additional channels **3850** within end effector support **3400** which guide the electrical leads from the housing **3020** to the individual jaw members **3110** and **3120**. One or more wire crimps or the like may be utilized to hold the electrical leads in place. Alternatively, cables **3901-3904** may be utilized to both articulate the end effector assembly **3100** and to supply electrical energy to the jaw members **3110** and **3120**.

In one embodiment, the electrically conductive sealing surfaces **3112** and **3122** of the jaw members **3110** and **3120**, respectively, are relatively flat to avoid current concentrations at sharp edges and to avoid arcing between high points. In addition and due to the reaction force of the tissue when engaged, jaw members **3110** and **3120** can be manufactured to resist bending. For example, the jaw members **3110** and **3120** may be tapered along the width thereof which resists bending due to the reaction force of the tissue.

It is envisioned that the outer surface of the end effector assembly **3100** may include a nickel-based material, coating, stamping, metal injection molding which is designed to reduce adhesion between the jaw members **3110** and **3120** with the surrounding tissue during activation and sealing. Moreover, it is also contemplated that the conductive surfaces **3112** and **3122** of the jaw members **3110** and **3120** may be manufactured from one (or a combination of one or more) of the following materials: nickel-chrome, chromium nitride, MedCoat 2000 manufactured by The Electrolyzing Corporation of OHIO, Inconel 600 and tin-nickel. The tissue conductive surfaces **3112** and **3122** may also be coated with one or more of the above materials to achieve the same result, i.e., a "non-stick surface". As can be appreciated, reducing the amount that the tissue "sticks" during sealing improves the overall efficacy of the instrument.

One particular class of materials disclosed herein has demonstrated superior non-stick properties and, in some instances, superior seal quality. For example, nitride coatings which include, but not are not limited to: TiN, ZrN, TiAlN, and CrN are preferred materials used for non-stick purposes. CrN has been found to be particularly useful for non-stick purposes due to its overall surface properties and optimal performance. Other classes of materials have also been found to reducing overall sticking. For example, high nickel/chrome alloys with a Ni/Cr ratio of approximately 5:1 have been found to significantly reduce sticking in bipolar instrumentation. One particularly useful non-stick material in this class is Inconel 600. Bipolar instrumentation having sealing surfaces **3112** and **122** made from or coated with Ni200, Ni201 (~100% Ni) also showed improved non-stick performance over typical bipolar stainless steel electrodes.

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Forceps **3010** may be designed such that it is fully or partially disposable depending upon a particular purpose or to achieve a particular result. For example, end effector assembly **100** may be selectively and releasably engageable with the distal end **3016** of the shaft **3012** and/or the proximal end **3014** of shaft **3012** may be selectively and releasably engageable with the housing **3020** and the handle assembly **3030**. In either of these two instances, the forceps **3010** would be considered "partially disposable" or "reposable", i.e., a new or different end effector assembly **3100** (or end effector assembly **3100** and shaft **3012**) selectively replaces the old end effector assembly **3100** as needed. As can be appreciated, the presently disclosed electrical connections would have to be altered to modify the instrument to a reposable forceps. Moreover, various composite materials may be employed for parts of the end effector assembly **3100** to lessen manufacturing costs.

In yet another embodiment, the entire shaft **3012** (or portions thereof) may be flexible (or substantially flexible) along a length thereof to facilitate negotiation through a tortuous path. The number and size of the flexible joints **3012a** and **3012b** and end effector assembly **3100** may be altered to meet a particular surgical purpose or to enhance effectiveness of the forceps **3010** for a particular surgical solution.

Although various cables, rods and shafts are employed for the various components herein, it is possible to substitute any one or all of these components with variations thereof depending upon a particular purpose.

In addition, it is also contemplated that one or more electrical motors may be utilized either automatically or manually to articulate the cables **3901-3904**, advance the knife rod **3504** or retract the drive rod **3032**.

The forceps **3010** is suited for use by either a left or right-handed user and the articulation wheels **3081** and **3091** are particularly situated atop the housing to facilitate usage thereof by either handed user.

Referring now to FIG. 57, another embodiment of an endoscopic vessel sealing forceps is depicted generally as **4010**. In the drawings and in the descriptions relating to this embodiment which follow, the term "proximal," as is traditional, will refer to the end of the forceps **4010** which is closer to the user, while the term "distal" will refer to the end which is farther from the user. The forceps **4010** comprises a housing **4020**, an end effector assembly **4100** and an elongated shaft **4012** extending therebetween to define a longitudinal axis A-A. A handle assembly **4030**, an articulation assembly **4075** composed of two articulation controls **4080** and **4090** and a trigger assembly **4070** are operable to control the end effector assembly **4100** to effectively grasp, seal and divide tubular vessels and vascular tissue. Although the forceps **4010** is configured for use in connection with bipolar surgical procedures, various aspects of the present disclosure may also be employed for monopolar surgical procedures.

Forceps **4010** includes an electrosurgical cable **4820**, which connects the forceps **4010** to a source of electrosurgical energy, e.g., a generator (not shown). It is contemplated that generators such as those sold by Covidien—Energy-based Devices may be used as a source of electrosurgical energy, e.g., LIGASURE™ Vessel Sealing Generator and Force Triad™ Generator. Cable **4820** may be internally divided into numerous leads (not shown), which each transmit electrosurgical energy through respective feed paths through the forceps **4010** for connection to the end effector assembly **4100**.

Handle assembly **4030** includes a fixed handle **4050** and a movable handle **4040**. The fixed handle **4050** is integrally associated with the housing **4020**, and the movable handle **4040** is movable relative to fixed handle **4050** to induce rela-

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tive movement between a pair of jaw members **4110**, **4120** of the end effector assembly **4100**. The movable handle **4040** is operatively coupled to the end effector assembly **4100** via a drive rod **4032** (see FIG. **58**), which extends through the elongated shaft **4012**, and reciprocates to induce movement in the jaw members **4110**, **4120**. Drive rod **4032** may be made of flexible material, such as steel wire. The movable handle **4040** may be approximated with fixed handle **4050** to move the jaw members **4110** and **4120** from an open position wherein the jaw members **4110** and **4120** are disposed in spaced relation relative to one another, to a clamping or closed position wherein the jaw members **4110** and **4120** cooperate to grasp tissue therebetween. Electrosurgical energy may be transmitted through tissue grasped between jaw members **4110**, **4120** to effect a tissue seal.

Trigger assembly **4070** is operable to advance a blade **4510** (FIG. **58**) through a knife channel, e.g., **4115b** defined in the jaw members **4110**, **4120** to transect sealed tissue. The trigger assembly **4070** is operatively coupled to the blade **4510** via a knife rod **4504** (FIG. **58**), which extends through the elongated shaft **4012**. Various aspects of the end effector assembly **4100**, the housing **4020**, handle assembly **4030**, the trigger assembly **4070** and the operation of these mechanisms to electrosurgically treat tissue are discussed in greater detail in commonly owned U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/157, 722, the entire content of which is incorporated by reference herein.

Elongated shaft **4012** defines a distal end **4016** dimensioned to mechanically engage the end effector assembly **4100** and a proximal end **4014**, which mechanically engages the housing **4020**. The elongated shaft **4012** includes two distinct portions, a proximal portion **4012a'** defining a proximal shaft axis B-B and a distal portion **4012b'** defining a distal shaft axis C-C.

The proximal portion **4012a'** of the shaft **4012** may exhibit various constructions. For example, the proximal portion **4012a'** may be formed from a substantially rigid tube, from flexible tubing (e.g., plastic), or the proximal portion **4012a'** may be formed as a composite of a flexible tube and a rigidizing element, such as a tube of braided steel, to provide axial (e.g., compressional) and rotational strength. In other embodiments, the proximal portion **4012a'** may be constructed from a plastically deformable material. In some embodiments the proximal portion **4012a'** exhibits a flexural rigidity that is sufficiently low to permit a surgeon to pre-shape or reshape the proximal portion **4012a'** prior to or during a surgical procedure to accommodate the contours and characteristics of the surgical site. Once shaped, the proximal end portion **12a'** may define a non-aligned configuration wherein the proximal shaft axis B-B is substantially out of alignment with the longitudinal axis A-A. The proximal portion **4012a'** may also exhibit an axial rigidity that is sufficient to maintain the shape and orientation of the non-aligned configuration during normal surgical use of the instrument **10**. In the embodiment described below with reference to FIGS. **64**, **66**, **68** and **70**, the proximal portion **4012a'** is maintained in the configuration aligned with the longitudinal axis A-A.

The distal portion **4012b'** of shaft **4012** includes an exterior casing or insulating material **4012b"** disposed over a plurality of joints or links **4012a**, **4012b** (see FIG. **58**). The links **4012a** and **4012b** are configured to pivot relative to one another to permit the distal portion **4012b'** of the shaft **4012** to articulate relative to the proximal shaft axis B-B. In one embodiment, the links **4012a** and **4012b** are nestingly engaged with one another to permit pivotal motion of the distal portion **4012b'** in two orthogonal in response to movement of articulation controls **4080** and **4090**.

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Articulation assembly **4075** sits atop housing **4020** and is operable via articulation controls **4080** and **4090** to move the end effector assembly **4100** (and the articulating distal portion **4012b'** of the shaft **4012**) in the direction of arrows "U, D" and "R, L" relative to axis proximal shaft axis B-B as explained in more detail below. Controls **4080** and **4090** may be provided in alternative arrangements such as disposed on the side of housing **4020**. Also, controls **4080** and **4090** may be replaced by other mechanisms to articulate the end effector **4100** such as levers, trackballs, joysticks, or the like.

Referring now to FIG. **58**, the articulating distal portion **4012b'** of shaft **4012** includes a plurality of links **4012a** and **4012b**. Each link **4012a** engages a neighboring link **4012b** such that the distal portion **4012b'** of the shaft **4012** may articulate the end effector assembly **4100**. Links **4012a** are similar in construction to links **4012b** in that each link **4012a**, **4012b** exhibits a pair of distal knuckles **4013a**, **4013b** and pair of opposing proximal clevises **11a**, **11b** formed therewith. Links **4012a**, however, are oriented with a ninety degree (90°) radial offset with respect to the neighboring link **4012b**. Such an alternating orientation of the links **4012a**, **4012b** facilitates articulation of the end effector **4100** in orthogonal planes. The distal knuckles **4013a** of links **4012a** define a horizontal pivot axis P1. Thus a distal knuckle **4013a** operatively engages a corresponding clevis **4011b** of a neighboring link **4012b** to facilitate articulation of the end effector **4100** in the direction of arrows "U, D" (FIG. **57**). Similarly, the distal knuckles **4013b** of links **4012b** define a vertical pivot axis P2 such that a distal knuckle **4013b** operatively engages a corresponding clevis **4011a** of a neighboring link **4012a** to facilitate articulation of the end effector **4100** in the direction of arrows "R, L."

Each link **4012a** and **4012b** includes a central lumen **4019a** extending longitudinally therethrough. The central lumen **4019a** permits passage of various actuators, e.g., drive rod **4032** and knife rod **4504**, and other components through the elongated shaft **4012**. Links **4012a**, **4012b** also define two pairs of opposed lumens **4017a** and **4017b** formed radially outward from the central lumen **4019a**. Each of the lumens **4017a** and **4017b** on a link **4012a** is radially spaced at a 90° from the neighboring lumen **4017a**, **4017b** such that each lumen **4017a** aligns with a lumen **4017b** of a neighboring link **4012b**. The lumens **4017a** and **4017b** cooperate to define a longitudinal cavity to permit passage of four steering cables **4901**, **4902**, **4903** and **4904** through the articulating portion **4012b'** of the elongated shaft **4012**. A differential tension may be imparted to the four steering cables **4901-4904** to adjust the orientation of the articulating distal portion **4012b'** of shaft **4012** as described below with reference to FIGS. **66**, **68** and **70**.

A link support **4320** includes a pair of distal knuckles **4013a** oriented similarly to a link **4012a** to interface with a trailing link **4012b**. A proximal end of the link support **4320** is fixedly mounted to an outer casing **4012a"**, which extends over the proximal portion **4012a'** of the elongated shaft **4012**. The outer casing **4012a"** is generally flexible to permit the proximal portion **4012a'** to flex and bend freely. An end effector support **4400** includes a pair of clevises **4011b** on a proximal end oriented similarly to a link **4012a** to receive the distal knuckles **4013b** of a leading link **4012b**.

The four steering cables **4901-4904** may be substantially elastic and slideably extend through lumens pairs **4017a**, and **4017b** defined in the links **4012a** and **4012b**. A distal end of the each of the steering cables **4901-4904** is coupled to the end effector support **4400**. More particularly, each steering cable **4901-4904** includes a ball-like mechanical interface at the distal end, namely, interfaces **4901a-4904a**. Each inter-

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face **4901a-4904a** is configured to securely mate within a corresponding recess defined in the end effector support **4400**. Interface **4904a** engages recess **4405a**, interface **4903a** engages recess **4405b**, and interfaces **4901a** and **4902a** engage similar recess on the end effector support **4400**.

Proximal ends of the steering cables **4901-4904** are operatively coupled to the articulation controls **4080**, **4090** as described below with reference to FIGS. **60** and **61**. The steering cables **4901-4904** extend through the shaft **4012** through a series of passageways defined therein. More particularly, a cross-shaped cable guide adapter **4315** and guide adapter liner or washer **4325** include bores defined there-through to initially orient the cables **4901-4904** at 90° degree angles relative to one another for passage into an outer tube **4310**. The adapter **4315** also facilitates attachment of the shaft **4012** to the housing **4020**. The tube **4310** includes passageways **4311a-4311d** defined therein to orient the cables **4901-4904**, respectively, for reception into the lumens **4017a**, **4017b** of links **4012a** and **4012b** for ultimate connection to the end effector support **4400** as described above.

A central guide tube **4305** is provided to orient the drive rod **4032** and the knife rod **4504** through the shaft **4012** for ultimate connection to jaw member **4110** and a knife assembly **4500**. The central guide tube **4305** also guides an electrical lead **4810** for providing electrosurgical energy to the jaw member **4110**. The central guide tube **4305** is dimensioned for reception within outer tube **4310**, and may extend distally therefrom into the central lumens **4019a** defined in the links **4012a** and **4012b**. One or more steering cables, e.g., **4902**, includes a distal portion **4902b** that electrically connects to the end effector support **4400** which, in turn, connects to jaw member **4120**. A return path (i.e., ground path) may thus be established through tissue captured between jaw members **4110** and **4120** for electrosurgical energy provided through jaw member **4110**.

The central extrusion or guide tube **4305** is constructed from a highly flexible and lubricious material and performs several important functions: tube **4305** guides the drive rod **4032**, the knife rod **4504** and the electrical lead **4810** from the guide adapter **4315**, shaft **4012** and flexible shaft **4012b'** to the end effector support **4400** and knife assembly **4500**; the tube **4305** provides electrical insulation between component parts; the tube **4305** keeps the lead **4810** and rods **4032** and **4504** separated during relative movement thereof; the tube **4305** minimizes friction and clamping force loss; and tube **4305** keeps the lead **4810** and rods **4032** and **4504** close to the central longitudinal axis to minimize stretching during articulation. The tube **4305** (and internal lumens) may be made from or include materials like polytetrafluoroethene (PTFE), graphite or other lubricating agents to minimize friction and other common losses associated with relative movement of component parts. Alternatively, a coaxial structure (not shown) may be utilized to guide the drive rod **4032** and knife rod **4504**.

One or more distal guide plates **430** and an adapter **435** may also be utilized to further align the drive rod **4032** and knife rod **4504** and facilitate actuation of the jaw members **4110** and **4120**. More particularly, alignment of the drive rod **4032** facilitates opening and closing the jaw members **4110**, **4120**. A sleeve **4130** includes an aperture **4135** to engage a flange **4137** of jaw member **4110** such that axial movement of the sleeve **4130** forces jaw member **4110** to rotate around pivot pin **4103** and clamp tissue. Sleeve **4130** connects to adapter **4435** which secures drive rod **4032** therein via a wire crimp **4440**. The drive rod **4032** has a flat **4032a** at a distal end thereof to reinforce attachment to crimp **4440**. By actuating movable handle **4040** (FIG. **57**), the drive rod **4032** retracts

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sleeve **4130** to close jaw member **4110** about tissue. Pulling the sleeve **4130** proximally closes the jaw members **4110** and **4120** about tissue grasped therebetween and pushing the sleeve **4130** distally opens the jaw members **4110** and **4120** for grasping purposes. The end effector assembly **4100** is designed as a unilateral assembly, i.e., jaw member **4120** is fixed relative to the shaft **4012** and jaw member **4110** pivots about a pivot pin **103** to grasp tissue.

Also, alignment of knife rod **4504** facilitates longitudinal movement of blade **4510**. Knife channel **4115b** runs through the center of jaw member **4120** and a similar knife channel (not shown) extends through the jaw member **4110** such that the blade **4510** can cut the tissue grasped between the jaw members **4110** and **4120** when the jaw members **4110** and **4120** are in the closed position.

Jaw member **4110** also includes a jaw housing **4116** which has an insulative substrate or insulator **4114** and an electrically conductive surface **4112**. Housing **4116** and insulator **4114** are dimensioned to securely engage the electrically conductive sealing surface **4112**. This may be accomplished by stamping, by overmolding, by overmolding a stamped electrically conductive sealing plate and/or by overmolding a metal injection molded seal plate. For example, the electrically conductive sealing plate **4112** may include a series of upwardly extending flanges that are designed to matingly engage the insulator **4114**. The insulator **4114** includes a shoe-like interface **4107** disposed at a distal end thereof which is dimensioned to engage the outer periphery of the housing **4116** in a slip-fit manner. The shoe-like interface **4107** may also be overmolded about the outer periphery of the jaw **4110** during a manufacturing step. It is envisioned that lead **4810** terminates within the shoe-like interface **4107** at the point where lead **4810** electrically connects to the seal plate **4112** (not shown). The movable jaw member **4110** also includes a wire channel (not shown) that is designed to guide electrical lead **4810** into electrical continuity with sealing plate **4112**.

All of these manufacturing techniques produce jaw member **4110** having an electrically conductive surface **4112** which is substantially surrounded by an insulating substrate **4114** and housing **4116**. The insulator **4114**, electrically conductive sealing surface **4112** and the outer, jaw housing **4116** are dimensioned to limit and/or reduce many of the known undesirable effects related to tissue sealing, e.g., flashover, thermal spread and stray current dissipation. Alternatively, it is also envisioned that jaw members **4110** and **4120** may be manufactured from a ceramic-like material and the electrically conductive surface(s) **4112** are coated onto the ceramic-like jaw members **4110** and **4120**.

Jaw member **4110** also includes a pivot flange **4118** which includes the protrusion **4137**. Protrusion **4137** extends from pivot flange **4118** and includes an arcuately-shaped inner surface dimensioned to matingly engage the aperture **4135** of sleeve **4130** upon retraction thereof. Pivot flange **4118** also includes a pin slot **4119** that is dimensioned to engage pivot pin **4103** to allow jaw member **4110** to rotate relative to jaw member **4120** upon retraction of the reciprocating sleeve **4130**. Pivot pin **4103** also mounts to the stationary jaw member **4120** through a pair of apertures **4101a** and **4101b** disposed within a proximal portion of the jaw member **4120**.

Jaw member **4120** includes similar elements to jaw member **4110** such as jaw housing **4126** and an electrically conductive sealing surface **4122**. Likewise, the electrically conductive surface **4122** and the insulative housing **4126**, when assembled, define the longitudinally-oriented channel **4115a** for reciprocation of the knife blade **4510**. As mentioned above, when the jaw members **4110** and **4120** are closed

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about tissue, the knife channel **4115b** permits longitudinal extension of the blade **4510** to sever tissue along the tissue seal.

Jaw member **4120** includes a series of stop members **4150** disposed on the inner facing surfaces of the electrically conductive sealing surface **4122** to facilitate gripping and manipulation of tissue and to define a gap “G” of about 0.001 inches to about 0.006 inches between opposing jaw members **4110** and **4120** during sealing and cutting of tissue. It is envisioned that the series of stop members **4150** may be employed on one or both jaw members **4110** and **4120** depending upon a particular purpose or to achieve a desired result. A detailed discussion of these and other envisioned stop members **4150** as well as various manufacturing and assembling processes for attaching and/or affixing the stop members **4150** to the electrically conductive sealing surfaces **112**, **122** are described in U.S. Pat. No. 7,473,253 (Ser. No. 10/471,818) entitled “VESSEL SEALER AND DIVIDER WITH NON-CONDUCTIVE STOP MEMBERS” by Dycus et al. which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety herein.

Jaw member **4120** is designed to be fixed to the end of a tube **4438**, which is part of the distal articulating portion **4012b'** of the shaft **4012**. Thus, articulation of the distal portion **4012b'** of the shaft **4012** will articulate the end effector assembly **4100**. Jaw member **4120** includes a rear C-shaped cuff **4170** having a slot **4177** defined therein that is dimensioned to receive a slide pin **4171** disposed on an inner periphery of tube **4438**. More particularly, slide pin **4171** extends substantially the length tube **4438** to slide into engagement (e.g., friction-fit, glued, welded, etc) within slot **4177**. C-shaped cuff **4170** inwardly compresses to assure friction-fit engagement when received within tube **4438**. Tube **4438** also includes an inner cavity defined therethrough that reciprocates the knife assembly **4500** upon distal activation thereof. The knife blade **4510** is supported atop a knife support **4505**. The knife rod **4504** feeds through adapter **4435** and operably engages a butt end **4505a** of the knife support **4505**. By actuating trigger assembly **4070**, the knife rod **4504** is forced distally into the butt end **4505a** which, in turn, forces the blade **4510** through tissue held between the jaw members **4110** and **4120**. The knife rod **4504** may be constructed from steel wire to enhance its axial stiffness of the rod along the length thereof, while simultaneously being flexible along its length.

As mentioned above, the jaw members **4110** and **4120** may be opened, closed and articulated to manipulate tissue until sealing is desired. This enables the user to position and reposition the forceps **4010** (FIG. 57) prior to activation and sealing. The unique feed path of the electrical lead **4810** through the housing, along shaft **4012** and, ultimately, to the jaw member **4110** enables the user to articulate the end effector assembly **4100** in multiple directions without tangling or causing undue strain on electrical lead **4810**.

Referring now to FIG. 59, the articulation assembly **4075** permits selective articulation of the end effector assembly **4100** to facilitate the manipulation and grasping of tissue. More particularly, the two controls **4080** and **4090** include selectively rotatable wheels, **4081** and **4091**, respectively, that sit atop the housing **4020** (FIG. 57). Each wheel, e.g., wheel **4081**, is independently moveable relative to the other wheel, e.g., **4091**, and allows a user to selectively articulate the end effector assembly **4100** in a given plane of articulation relative to the longitudinal axis A-A. For example, rotation of wheel **4091** articulates the end effector assembly **4100** along arrows R, L (or right-to-left articulation, see FIGS. 57 and 68) by rotating cam wheel **4096** to induce a differential tension

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and a corresponding longitudinal motion in steering cables **4903** and **4904**. Similarly, rotation of wheel **4081** articulates the end effector assembly along arrows U, D (or up-and-down articulation, see FIGS. 57 and 70) by rotating cam wheel **4086** to induce a differential tension and a corresponding longitudinal motion in steering cables **4901** and **4902**.

Referring now to FIG. 60, the articulation assembly **4075** includes an articulation block **4250**, which mounts longitudinally within the housing **4020** (FIG. 57). Rotatable wheel **4081** is operatively coupled to the articulation block **4250** via an elongated hollow block **4084**. The block **4084** is mechanically coupled at one end to the wheel **4081** by a set-screw or a friction-fit, for example, such that rotation of the wheel **4081** rotates the block **4084**. An opposite end of the block **4084** interfaces similarly with the cam wheel **4086** such that rotation of the block **4084** effects rotation of the cam wheel **4086** relative to the articulation block **4250**. A cover plate **4082** is attached to the articulation block **4250** by bolts or other mechanical connections and prevents the cam wheel **4086** from sliding out of a receiving hole in the articulation block **4250**.

Cam wheel **4086**, in turn, mounts to the articulation block **4250** such that each of two arcuate cam slots **4086a** and **4086b** formed therein couples to a respective slider **4255a** and **4255b**. Each slider **4255a**, **4255b** includes a pin (not shown) protruding toward the respective cam slot **4086a** and **4086b**. The cam slots **4086a** and **4086b** are eccentric with respect to the cam wheel **4086**, i.e., the cam slots **4086a** and **4086b** do not share a center of rotation with the cam wheel **4086**. Thus rotation of the cam wheel **4086** induces the sliders **4255a**, **4255b** to ride along a respective predefined rail **4254a** and **4254b** disposed in the articulation block **4250**.

The sliders **4255a** and **4255b** each couple to an end of a respective steering cable **4901** and **4902** via a series of crimped sleeves **4256a**, **4256b**, coupling shafts **4253a**, **4253b**, washers **4258a**, **4258b**, elastic compression bushings or springs **4259a**, **4259b** and tensioning bolts **4257a**, **4257b**. This connection is described in greater detail below with reference to FIG. 61.

Thus, the steering cables **4901** and **4902** are coupled to the wheel **4091** such that rotation of the wheel **4081** in a given direction causes the respective sliders **4255a** and **4255b** to slide oppositely relative to one another within rails **4254a** and **4254b** to pull or stretch a respective steering cable **4901**, **4902**. For example, rotation of wheel **4081** in a clockwise direction from the perspective of a user, i.e. in the direction of arrow **4081d** (DOWN “D”), causes the cam wheel **4086** to rotate clockwise which, in turn, causes the pins protruding from the sliders **4255a**, **4255b** to move longitudinally.

As a result thereof, as slider **4255a** moves distally and slider **4255b** moves proximally, steering cable **4901** moves distally and steering cable **4902** moves proximally, thus causing end effector assembly **4100** to articulate DOWN “D”. When wheel **4081** is rotated counter-clockwise, i.e. in the direction of arrow **4081u**, (UP “U”) the sliders **4255a** and **4255b** move in an opposite direction on rails **4254a** and **4254b**. The end effector assembly **4100** is affected oppositely, i.e., the end effector assembly **4100** is articulated in an UP “U” direction (See FIG. 70). Rotational movement of wheel **4081** thus moves the end effector assembly **4100** in an UP “U” and DOWN “D” plane relative to the longitudinal axis A-A (See FIG. 57). The cam connection between the sliders **4255a** and **4255b** and the cam wheel **4086** offers increased mechanical advantage when a user increases the articulation angle, i.e., the cam connection helps overcome the increasing resistance to articulation as the articulating portion **4012b'** of shaft

4012 is articulated in a given direction. The cam connection is described in greater detail below with reference to FIGS. **63**, **65** and **67**.

Rotatable wheel **4091** of articulation control **4090** is coupled to articulation block **4250** in a similar manner. More particularly, wheel **4091** operatively engages one end of a solid spindle **4094** which, in turn, attaches at an opposite end thereof to cam wheel **4096** disposed on an opposite end of the articulation block **4250**. Solid spindle **4094** is dimensioned for insertion through hollow block **4084** such that the solid spindle **4094** is rotatable relative to the hollow block **4084**. Solid spindle **4094** passes through the hollow block **4084** and engages a locking nut **4099**. Locking nut **4099** exhibits an outer profile that permits the locking nut **4099** to seat within a locking recess **4096'** engraved within cam wheel **4096**. Locking nut **4099** is fixedly coupled to cam wheel **4096** by welding or a similar process such that rotational motion of the solid spindle **4094** is transferred to the cam wheel **4096**. Hollow block **4084** exhibits an inner profile such that the solid spindle **4094** has sufficient clearance to rotate therein without causing rotation of the hollow block **4084**.

A cover plate **4092** is utilized to secure the cam wheel **4096** to the articulation block **4250**. Much like cam wheel **4086**, rotation cam wheel **4096** operably couples to a pair of sliders **4255c** and **4255d**, which are configured to ride in rails **4254c** and **4254d** defined in the articulation block **4250**. More particularly, each cam slot **4096a** and **4096b** of cam wheel **4096** engages a respective slider **4255c** and **4255d**. Each slider **4255c**, **4255d** includes a pin **4255c'**, **4255d'** protruding into the respective cam slot **4096a** and **4096b** such that rotation of the cam wheel **4096** induces longitudinal motion of the sliders **4255c**, **4255d** within the respective rails **4254c** and **4254d**. Thus, rotation of the cam wheel **4096** in a given direction causes the respective sliders **4255c** and **4255d** to slide oppositely relative to one another within rails **4254c** and **4254d**. The sliders **4255c** and **4255d** each couple to an end of a respective steering cable **4903** and **4904** via a series of tensioning bolts **4256c**, **4256d**, sleeves **4253c**, **4253d**, washers **4258c**, **4258d**, elastic compression bushings or springs **4259c**, **4259d** and tensioning bolts **4257c**, **4257d** as discussed below with reference to FIG. **61**. Thus, the movement of the sliders **4255c** and **4255d** tends to pull or contract respective steering cables **4903**, **4904**.

Rotation of wheel **4091** in a clockwise direction from the perspective of a user, i.e., in the direction of arrow **4091R** (RIGHT "R"), causes the cam wheel **4096** to rotate clockwise which, in turn, drives the pin **4255c'** distally and pin **4255d'** proximally (See FIG. **67**). As a result thereof, slider **4255c** moves distally and slider **4255d** moves proximally causing steering cable **4903** to move distally and steering cable **4904** to move proximally thus causing end effector assembly **4100** to articulate to the RIGHT "R" (see FIG. **68**). When wheel **4091** is rotated counter-clockwise, i.e. in the direction of arrow **4091L**, the sliders **4255c** and **4255d** move in an opposite direction on rails **4254c** and **4254d** (see FIG. **69**) and end effector assembly **4100** has an opposite effect, i.e., the end effector assembly **4100** is articulated to the LEFT "L" (see FIG. **70**). Rotational movement of wheel **4091** moves the end effector assembly **4100** in a RIGHT and LEFT plane relative to the longitudinal axis A-A.

As depicted in FIG. **61**, the sleeves **256a**, **256c** are crimped securely to an end of a respective steering cable **4901**, **4903**. The crimped sleeves **4256a**, **4256c** are disposed within a cavity of a respective coupling shaft **4253a**, **4253c** and are retained therein. The coupling shafts **4253a**, **4253c** are coupled to the sliders **44255a**, **4255c** by tensioning bolts **4257a**, **4245c**. The tensioning bolts **4257a**, **4257c** are

threaded into the coupling shafts **4253a**, **4253c** to a depth sufficient to impart an appropriate tension on the steering cables **4901**, **4903**. The washers **4258a**, **4258c** and compression bushings **4259a**, **4259c** are positioned between the head of the tensioning bolts **4257a**, **4245c**, and the sliders **4255a**, **4255c** such that the compression bushings **4259a**, **4259c** may be compressed to resist the tension imparted to the steering cables **4901**, **4903**. Thus, the general tension in the steering cables **4901**, **4903** may be adjusted by adjusting the depth to which the tensioning bolts **4257a**, **4245c** are threaded into the coupling shafts **4253a**, **4253c**. Adjusting the tension in the steering cables **4901**, **4903** may facilitate accurately defining a home position of the end effector **4100**.

Referring now to FIGS. **60** and **62**, an indexing mechanism is provided including indexing slides **4265c** and **4265d**. Each of the slides **4265c** and **4265d** includes an engagement head **4265c'**, **4265d'** having a tooth for engaging a respective outer circumferential surface of the cam wheels **4086**, **4096**. The outer circumferential surfaces of the cam wheels **4086**, **4096** include discrete teeth disposed thereabout to permit incremental positioning of the cam wheels **4086**, **4096**, thus facilitating precise positioning of the end effector **4100**. The indexing slides **4265c**, **4265d** are biased toward the cam wheels by springs **4262c**, **4262d**, which are held in position by threaded caps **4263c**, **4263d**.

As depicted in FIG. **62**, the indexing slides **4265c**, **4265d** are slidably disposed within elongated bores **4251c** and **4251d** defined in the articulation block **4250**. The springs **4262c**, **4262d** extend into the indexing slides **4265c**, **4265d** and bear against interior surfaces thereof to bias the engagement heads **4265c'**, **4265d'** of the indexing slides **4265c**, **4265d** against the outer circumferential surfaces of the cam wheels **4086**, **4096**. The threaded caps **4263c**, **4263d** are threaded into the elongated bores **4251c**, **4251d** enclosing the indexing slides **4265c**, **4265d** therein. The caps **4263c**, **4263d** bear against the springs **4262c**, **4262d** such that the springs **4262c**, **4262d** are compressed sufficiently to provide an appropriate engagement force between the indexing slides **4265c**, **4265d** and the cam wheels **4086**, **4096**. The engagement force may be adjusted by adjusting the depth to which the caps **4265c**, **4265d** are threaded.

In use, as a user turns rotatable wheel **4091**, for example, the cam wheel **4096** rotates along therewith. The discrete teeth on the outer circumferential surface of the cam wheel **4096** engage the engagement head **4265c'** of the indexing slide **4265c** and drive the indexing slide **4265c** longitudinally against the bias of the spring **4262c**. When the cam wheel **4096** is turned to a position such that the engagement head **4265c'** engages the cam wheel **4096** between the discrete teeth, the articulating mechanism is driven to a relatively stable configuration by the spring **4262c**, thus permitting the user to adjust the articulation of the end effector **4100** in small, but finite increments. Since the diameter of the cam wheel **4096** is relatively large, the resolution of the indexing mechanism may be relatively high, permitting the user to position the end effector **4100** accurately.

As can be appreciated, the articulation assembly **4075** enables a user to selectively articulate the distal end of the forceps **4010** (i.e., the end effector assembly **4100**) as needed during surgery providing greater flexibility and enhanced maneuverability to the forceps **4010** especially in tight surgical cavities. By virtue of the unique arrangement of the four (4) spring loaded steering cables **4901-4904**, each articulation control **4080** and **4090** provides a positive drive, back and forth motion to the end effector assembly **4100** that allows the end effector assembly **4100** to remain in an articulated configuration under strain or stress as the forceps **4010** is utilized,

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and/or prevent buckling of the elongated shaft **4012** (FIG. **57**) through a range of motion. Due to the gradual slope of the cam slots **4086a**, **4086b**, **4096a**, **4096b** relative to the large angular travel of the rotatable wheels **4081**, **4091**, the articulating assembly **4075** tends to be self locking. This arrangement provides sufficient friction such that no additional lock is needed to maintain the end effector assembly **4100** in an articulated configuration. Various mechanical elements may be utilized to enhance this purpose including the indexing slides **4265c**, **4265d** and the tensioning/locking mechanisms associated with slides **4265a**-**4265d**. In addition, the flexible shaft **4012** and end effector assembly **4100** may also be manipulated to allow multi-directional articulation through the manipulation of both wheels **4081** and **4091** simultaneously or sequentially thereby providing more maneuverability to the forceps.

Referring now to FIGS. **63** and **64**, the articulation assembly **4075** may be moved to a "home" position to maintain the articulating portion **4012b'** of shaft **4012** in a non-articulated orientation aligned with the proximal shaft axis B-B. In the home position, the proximal portion **4012a'** of the elongated shaft **4012** may also be aligned with the longitudinal axis A-A. When the articulation assembly **4075** is moved to a "home" position for the RIGHT and LEFT plane, the pins **4255c'** and **4255d'** are generally centered in the cam slots **4096a**, **4096b**. The steering cables **4903** and **4904**, are thus disposed centrally along their respective longitudinal range of travel within the elongated shaft **4012**. A tension imparted to the steering cables **4903**, **4904** by tensioning bolts **4257c** and **4257d** causes the steering cables **4903**, **4904** to draw the end effector support **4400** in a proximal direction and imparts a compressive force on the links **4012a**, **4012b**. This general tension reduces slack and play in the articulation assembly **4075**. The "home" position represents a state of minimum stored energy in the substantially elastic steering cables **4903**, **4904** in which the collective stretching is least.

In use, if the end effector assembly **4100** experiences a lateral load "L" the links **4012a** and **4012b** may resist a tendency to pivot relative to one another due to the general tension in the steering cables **4903**, **4904**. The links **4012a** and **4012b** may thus maintain alignment with the proximal shaft axis B-B. If however, the lateral load "L" is sufficient to overcome this tendency, the links **4012a** will pivot relative to neighboring links **4012b** to cause the end effector assembly **4100** to articulate relative to the proximal shaft axis B-B. The lateral load "L" will cause steering cable **4904** to stretch and move relative to steering cable **4903**. The stretching of steering cable **4904** increases the collective tension and stored energy of the steering cables **4903**, **4904** as the end effector assembly **4100** articulates. When the load "L" is removed, the links **4012a** and **4012b** will tend to return to the "home" position where the collective stored energy in the steering cables **4903**, **4904** is at a minimum. In this regard, the links **4012a** and **4012b** may be regarded as "self-centering."

Referring now to FIGS. **65** and **66**, the steering cables **4903**, **4904** permit articulation assembly **4075** to be manipulated to articulate the end effector assembly **4100** in the RIGHT and LEFT plane. As discussed above with reference to FIG. **60**, the rotatable wheel **4091** may be turned to move the steering cables **4903** and **4904**. Rotation of the rotatable wheel **4091** rotates the cam wheel **4096** such that the cam slots **4096a**, **4096b** draw pins **4255c'** and **4255d'** toward a respective end of the cam slots **4096a**, **4096b** that is disposed radially outward on the cam wheel **4096**. Since the steering cables **4903**, **4904** are coupled to pins as described above, the steering cable **4903** is moved distally while the steering cable **4904** is drawn proximally. When the steering cable **4904** is

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retracted proximally as depicted in FIG. **65**, the end effector assembly **4100** is articulated in the direction of arrow "R" with respect to the proximal shaft axis B-B as depicted in FIG. **66**. The retraction of the steering cable **4904** causes the links **4012a** to pivot relative to neighboring links **4012b** in the direction of arrow "R." Similarly, rotatable wheel **4091** may be turned to retract steering cable **4903** as depicted in FIG. **67**. In this configuration, the cam wheel **4096** is rotated such that the cam slots **4096a**, **4096b** draw pins **4255c'** and **4255d'** toward a respective end of the cam slots **4096a**, **4096b** that is disposed radially inward on the cam wheel **4096**. Thus steering cable **4903** is retracted proximally and steering cable **4904** is moved distally and inducing articulation of the end effector **4100** in the direction of arrow "L" as depicted in FIG. **68**.

Referring now to FIGS. **69** and **70**, the radial offset between links **4012a** and **4012b** permit the end effector assembly **4100** to articulate in an UP and DOWN plane as well. For example, steering cable **4901** may be retracted by turning rotatable wheel **4081** as described above with reference to FIG. **60**. The end effector assembly **4100** may thereby be articulated from a "home" position in the UP and DOWN plane as depicted in FIG. **69** to an articulated position in the direction of arrow "U" as depicted in FIG. **70**. Similarly, the steering cable **4902** may be retracted to induce articulation of the end effector assembly in the direction of arrow "D".

The shape of the cam slots **4086a**, **4086b**, **4096a** and **4096b** is tapered to provide the mechanical advantage to overcome the increasing resistance to articulation as the articulating portion **4012b'** of shaft **4012** is articulated in a given direction. The slope of the cam slots **4086a**, **4086b**, **96a** and **96b** decreases toward the extremities of the cam slots **4086a**, **4086b**, **4096a** and **4096b**. The cam slots **4086a**, **4086b**, **4096a**, **4096b** impart a decreasing longitudinal motion to the sliders **4255a**-**4255d** for a given radial displacement of the cam members **4086**, **4096** as the end effector **4100** is articulated further from the home position. Thus, a user must turn the wheels **4081**, **4091** further, but with a reduced force as compared to a mechanism having non-tapered cam slots.

The forceps **4010** is suited for use by either a left or right-handed user and the articulation wheels **4081** and **4091** are particularly situated atop the housing **4020** (FIG. **57**) to facilitate usage thereof by either handed user. In another embodiment of a forceps (not shown), the entire shaft **4012** (or portions thereof) may be flexible (or substantially flexible) along a length thereof to facilitate negotiation through a tortuous path. The number and size of the links **4012a** and **4012b** and end effector assembly **4100** may be altered to meet a particular surgical purpose or to enhance effectiveness of the forceps **4010** for a particular surgical solution.

In addition, it is also contemplated that one or more electrical motors may be utilized either automatically or manually to move the steering cables **4901**-**4904**, advance the knife rod **4504** or retract the drive rod **4032**. Although various cables, rods and shafts are employed for the various components herein, it is possible to substitute any one or all of these components with variations thereof depending upon a particular purpose.

While several embodiments of the disclosure have been depicted in the drawings, it is not intended that the disclosure be limited thereto, as it is intended that the disclosure be as broad in scope as the art will allow and that the specification be read likewise. Therefore, the above description should not be construed as limiting, but merely as exemplifications of particular embodiments. Those skilled in the art will envision other modifications within the scope and spirit of the claims appended hereto.

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What is claimed is:

1. An endoscopic forceps, comprising: a housing;
a shaft extending from the housing and defining a longitudinal axis, the shaft including a flexible portion;
an end effector supported adjacent a distal end of the flexible portion of the shaft, the end effector including a pair of jaw members configured and dimensioned to connect to a source of electrosurgical energy, at least one jaw member being pivotable relative to the other jaw member, the end effector including structure to accommodate a drive rod having a flexible distal portion mounting a knife;
a drive assembly disposed within the housing, the drive assembly operable to pivot the at least one jaw member relative to the other jaw member from a first position wherein the movable jaw member is disposed in spaced relation relative to the other jaw member to a second position wherein the movable jaw member is closer to the other jaw member for manipulating tissue;
a movable handle pivotably supported on the housing, the movable handle in mechanical cooperation with the drive assembly such that the movable handle is rotatable relative to the housing to move the jaw members between the first and second positions;
an articulation assembly including at least one steering cable operably coupled to the flexible portion of the shaft such that movement of the articulation assembly causes the flexible portion of the shaft to articulate relative to the longitudinal axis, the articulation assembly including a manually operated articulation wheel mounted at least partially within the housing, the articulation wheel defining a plane transverse to the longitudinal axis, the articulation wheel being operably coupled to the at least one steering cable such that rotation of the articulation

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- wheel moves the at least one steering cable to articulate the flexible portion of the shaft relative to the longitudinal axis; and
wherein the flexible portion of the shaft includes a plurality of joints that interengage to facilitate articulation of the flexible portion of the shaft relative to the longitudinal axis, each joint of the plurality of joints including a longitudinally aligned clevis, the clevis defining an axially longitudinally aligned central lumen, the joint further defining at least one longitudinal lumen offset from the central lumen for slidable receiving the at least one steering cable, the central lumen of the plurality of joints configured and dimensioned to accommodate reciprocal motion of the flexible distal portion of the drive rod.
2. The endoscopic forceps of claim 1 wherein the articulation assembly includes two steering cables and each of the joints has two longitudinal lumens offset from the central lumen to accommodate reciprocal motion of the two steering cables.
 3. The endoscopic forceps of claim 1 wherein the longitudinally aligned clevis of each joint is configured and dimensioned to operably engage a knuckle of an adjacent joint to facilitate articulation.
 4. The endoscopic forceps of claim 1 wherein jaw members further define a longitudinally oriented slot configured and dimensioned to accommodate a portion of the knife when the jaw members are in the second position.
 5. The endoscopic forceps of claim 1 further comprising a plurality of stop members disposed on inner facing surfaces of the jaw members.
 6. The endoscopic forceps device according to claim 1, where the at least one steering cable is configured and dimensioned to provide a return path to the electrosurgical energy source.

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